COVID-19 Update

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Overall trends

• Over the past week we have seen a significant increase in the number of cases and outbreaks in Waterloo Region.
• We have also seen a similar increase in the number of high-risk contacts that require follow-up.
• We see that spread of COVID-19 often starts at social gatherings or events.
• This is leading to multiple clusters of cases and outbreaks in various settings in our community, such as:
  o workplaces and businesses
  o schools and post-secondary institutions
  o congregate care settings like long-term care homes
• This is consistent with what is being seen in other communities across Ontario.
• Over the last week, we have reported almost 300 new positive cases.
• Given the continual increase in our case numbers and complexity of outbreaks, over the past week, we have met the indicators in the Orange-Restrict category of the Provincial framework.
  o Our current weekly incidence rate is 46 cases per 100,000
  o Our current per cent positivity is 3.6 percent.
    ▪ This number takes into account interim data that is not finalized and therefore is subject to change.
  o Our reproductive rate is 1.5
  o We have observed an increase in outbreaks in multiple sectors/settings with outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes, workplaces, congregate care setting and other community settings.
  o This means the spread and circulation of COVID-19 has significantly increased in Waterloo Region.
  o Hospital and ICU capacity
- Our hospitalizations have remained stable, but this is a lagging indicator, meaning that there is often a delay between when someone tests positive and when they experience severe illness, requiring hospital care.
- Our hospitals are also reporting high-occupancy levels meaning that a shift in hospitalizations for COVID-19 would have significant impacts.
  - In the past seven days our ability to reach cases and contacts within 24 hours is 92.4 per cent
- We have asked the Province to reassess the appropriate level of measures for our region, based on these indicators.
- **As such, we expect that Waterloo Region may be moved to the Orange-Restrict category, pending Provincial Cabinet approval.**

**Public Health response**

- Locally, we have also executed on our plan to increase staff for the second wave.
- We have put a number of measures in place to help us manage this surge including:
  - re-allocating staff
  - requesting additional help from the Ministry
  - working with Public Health Ontario for follow up of contacts
  - pursuing virtual initiation of contacts
- We are also looking to add recommendations for long-term care and retirement home settings including discontinuing indoor visitors by “general visitors” and limiting all indoor visits with residents to one essential visitor.
- We are also collaborating with a multi-ministry team of Provincial Offences Officers on an education and enforcement campaign for two weeks beginning on November 16.
  - This supports current efforts to build awareness and ensure workplaces can stay safe and stay open.
- We will consider adding more restrictions, if the measures are not enough.
- We appreciate that the framework is new and that many organizations are adapting to the changes made last week.
- Some of the new intermediate measures under the Orange-Restrict category would include all measures from previous levels as well as:
  - Limiting indoor capacity to 50 people
  - Limiting operating hours, closing at 10 p.m. with alcohol sales ending an hour earlier at 9 p.m.
  - Requiring screening of patrons (e.g. questionnaire)
  - Limiting to a maximum of four people seated together
  - Prohibiting personal care services that require removing a face covering
- As we have seen over the past two weeks, COVID-19 can accelerate rapidly.
• We recommend that businesses make plans for each level of the framework, because as we have seen, as cases accelerate we can move quickly into the next level of measures.

Concluding remarks

• We all have a role to play to slow the spread in Waterloo Region.
• We are asking all residents to continue to practice public health measures:
  o Wash your hands often
  o Limit close (unprotected) contact to only your immediate household members
    ▪ Practice physical distancing and wear a face covering or mask with everyone else
    ▪ Gather virtually instead of in person.
    ▪ If gathering in person practice physical distancing and wear a face covering.
    ▪ Gather outdoors or in well ventilated indoor spaces and avoid crowded places and enclosed, poorly ventilated spaces
    ▪ Minimize, where possible, the number of people at a gathering
  o Stay home if you are sick, even if you only have mild symptoms and seek testing
• We appreciate that these changes are significant. These restrictions are necessary to protect vulnerable settings, for schools and businesses to stay open and to enable medical procedures and surgeries to continue – as much as possible.
  o It is vitally important that we do all what we can to support our local hospitals and ensure that our health system capacity does not become overwhelmed.
• We know COVID-19 spreads easily indoors and in close contact. It does not discriminate. No setting is exempt from the potential for COVID-19 to spread.
• The goal of moving to Orange is to be preventive in nature, to delay even further restrictions.
• These are challenging and rapidly changing times for our community, but we can do this together.
• Together we can, and will, make a difference.
• Thank you.