



Coordinated COVID-19 Response Newsletter

February 5, 2021

The purpose of this newsletter is to keep local stakeholders informed about the coordinated community response to the evolving COVID-19 situation. The Region, area municipalities and local community partners are meeting regularly to make sure our pandemic response efforts are coordinated and aligned. This work is being done through a Community Pandemic Control Group which coordinates the efforts and actions of the sector control groups which are described in this document.

Community Pandemic Control Group (CPCG)

The Community Pandemic Control Group has been meeting regularly to share information, facilitate sharing of resources, and guide the community-wide pandemic response in five areas: health, community support, critical infrastructure, the municipalities and communications. The following sections provide an update on these five areas that are working together to ensure an effective and efficient response to the COVID-19 pandemic in our community.

1. Health Sector Control Group (HSCG)

This group of representatives from hospital/acute care, primary care, long-term care & retirement homes, Home and Community Care, Homeless/Shelter groups, Public Health and Paramedic Services meets regularly to discuss emerging issues and trends as part of their collective work in COVID response. The following is an update on the discussions that took place at these meetings.

COVID-19 Dashboard

Public Health continues to update the COVID-19 dashboard on the Region's website:
www.regionofwaterloo.ca/COVID19summary.

UK Variant detected in Waterloo Region

The UK variant has been detected in Waterloo Region. Early evidence suggests that the UK variant spreads more easily and there are emerging concerns about the potential for more severe illness. However, our continued commitment to public health measures is the best way to protect ourselves and loved ones against the spread of COVID-19, including the spread of the UK variant and other variants of concern.

- Avoid social gatherings with those outside your immediate household
 - Limit non-essential trips outside your home
 - Practice physical distancing
 - Wear a face covering
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- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
 - Avoid enclosed, poorly ventilated spaces and crowded places
 - Stay home when you are sick

If you develop symptoms, isolate from household members and schedule an appointment for testing. For more information about testing visit regionofwaterloo.ca/COVID19testing

COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force Update

As we move into the mid-point of Phase 1 vaccine rollout in Waterloo Region, it is important to reflect on what we have accomplished and where we are heading.

Thank you to our front line workers

Although we have had to pause and redirect our clinics to address fluctuations in supply, there is still a lot of work happening behind the scenes. We want to thank all of our front line workers who have over the past few weeks provided second doses to our priority groups in long-term care and retirement homes. Your work continues to help us deliver our available vaccine supply as effectively as possible.

A number of people are bringing their expertise in planning, logistics, human resources, administration, operations and communications to the front lines. This will ensure we are ready to ramp up vaccination when our supply increases.

There are also many community partners in primary care and health care who are mobilizing to be ready to assist in whichever way they can on the front line. All of these groups working together, towards a common goal highlights the true nature of Waterloo Region. From our roots in barn raising, this community has come together once again to help each other and it is truly inspirational.

A phased approach

The Province directs the plan that we follow locally. Ontario's three-phase COVID-19 vaccination program is now in [Phase 1](#) and will run until roughly end of March. This phase prioritizes health care workers, essential caregivers, long-term care home and high-risk retirement home residents as well as First Nation communities and urban Indigenous populations, including Métis and Inuit adults. Moving through all phases will depend on the stability and types of vaccine we receive locally. Currently we have paused certain clinics while we await more supply. As more supply becomes available, we will complete all of the priority groups in phase 1 and the Province will move to [Phase 2](#).

Vaccination clinics across the province are not open to the general-public at this time. COVID-19 vaccination for the broader community will not be available in Waterloo Region until summer or fall 2021 when the province launches [Phase 3](#).

The province continues to review prioritized lists. Therefore, these lists are subject to change as the situation evolves.

Role clarity

All levels of government are working together to achieve vaccine rollout. The Federal government will focus on procurement of supply, approval of vaccines and distribution to the provinces.

Once the province receives vaccine supply, the focus is on prioritized rollout including determining who will get the vaccine and when. Once prioritization is determined, distribution of vaccine will occur to local hospitals and health units.

In Waterloo Region, we receive our vaccines from the provincial government and are responsible for distributing and administering of vaccines locally, based on provincial prioritization.

How you can help

While we work toward the mass immunization program, we appreciate your patience and trust. We need everyone to continue to follow the public health measures in order to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

We also encourage you to have conversations about the COVID-19 vaccine with your family, friends and coworkers. Share your story and why you are choosing to be vaccinated. If you or someone you know has questions, always direct them to check out reliable sources. Here are a few that we recommend:

- [Health Canada](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Health](#)
- [Region of Waterloo](#)

For more information about the Task Force, visit: regionofwaterloo.ca/VaccineTaskForce

In this together

It's been a tough year. One thing is for certain, as a region, we have come together to help support and protect each other.

As we patiently wait for the vaccine, it's important to continue to be kind to yourself and each other. Show your support by displaying one of our signs in your window.



To find out how you can participate visit:

<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/in-this-together.aspx>

2. Community Support Control Group (CSCG)

The Region, the area municipalities and many community partners have taken action to support the health and safety of vulnerable people affected by COVID-19. The Community Support Control Group is addressing the following service areas: Food Services; Housing and Homelessness Services; Children's Services; Psychosocial and Spiritual Support Services; Animal Care Services. Below is the update from the Community Support Control Group. For more information on each of the service areas, please visit the Community Support Control Group webpage.



www.regionofwaterloo.ca/communitysupportsCOVID19.

For the month of January 2021:

- 8,154 hampers were distributed throughout Waterloo Region, serving 10,585 people.
- 151 households accessed food assistance for the first time.
- 397 household deliveries were made by community programs and agency partners.
- Over 290 calls were received on the Food Assistance Network centralized call line.

The Food Bank of Waterloo Region working with Region of Waterloo Public Health Emergency Services has updated [COVID-19 Guidelines for Food Programs](#), which provides detailed guidelines for food programs to consider when operating. The guidelines focus on the processes and procedures that should be put in place to support the health and safety of staff, volunteers, and community members visiting community programs and agency partners

Under the stay-at-home order and state of emergency orders, community programs and agency partners as part of the Community Food Assistance Network continue to provide access to food and other vital services and supports. Visit thefoodbank.ca/vitalservice for the most up-to-date list of available community meal and hamper programs. The [following resource poster](#) can be used to direct people to accurate community resources. The Food Bank of Waterloo Region, Salvation Army, and Family and Children Services have partnered to continue providing hamper deliveries in 2021. Community members can call: 519.743.5576 ext. 340 to be screened for delivery or to identify a food assistance program in their area.

Housing Services and Homelessness

The community is working together to continue to protect people experiencing homelessness from COVID-19 and has increased capacity in temporary accommodations to respond to an increased demand for emergency shelter beds.

Drop-in programs / services continue to be available in Kitchener Monday through Friday at St. John's Kitchen and Ray of Hope Community Centre, and in Cambridge at 150 Main St. on weekday afternoons



(Monday through Friday).

Community Supports available to individuals experiencing homelessness can be found on the Region of Waterloo's COVID-19 Community Supports page: <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/covid-19-community-supports-for-the-vulnerable.aspx#>

In preparation for the cold winter weather, the Region has worked with area municipalities and community partners to make warming centres available for individuals experiencing homelessness. These warming centres are available during extreme weather events, which Community Services defines as days where:

- the temperature is –15 (minus fifteen) degrees Celsius or lower, and/or
- the wind chill factor will be –15 (minus fifteen) degrees Celsius or lower, and/or
- there is freezing rain.

The warming centres are:

- **Region of Waterloo Buildings:** 99 Regina St. St., Waterloo, 150 Frederick St., Kitchener, 150 Main St., Cambridge
 - Monday through Friday
 - 8:30AM - 4:30PM
- **City of Waterloo Adult Recreation Centre:** 185 King St. S, Waterloo
 - Monday through Sunday
 - 10:00AM - 6:00pm
- **Emmanuel United Church Waterloo:** 22 Bridgeport Road W., Waterloo
 - Tuesday through Friday
 - 12:30PM - 3:00pm

Child and Family

Emergency child care for school aged children continues to be available through the stay at home order, at least until February 10th, 2021, and the list of [those who are eligible](#) has expanded. More than 241 children are attending Emergency Child Care at 7 schools and more than 68 children are receiving care in licensed home child care.

Animal Care Services

All animal services continue to be offered including veterinary services, lost and found, euthanasia, cremation, emergency boarding and emergency pet food bank. Adoptions will remain on hold until the lifting of the “stay at home” order. In the meantime, the animals are enjoying being in homes with their foster families. If anyone needs to come to the Humane Society, we ask they call first to make an appointment.



Psychosocial & Spiritual Supports

The COVID-19 pandemic may be stressful for some. Fear and anxiety about the disease and what could happen can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Public health actions, such as social distancing, can make people feel isolated and lonely and can increase stress and anxiety. However, these actions are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Coping with stress in a healthy way will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger.

Don't be afraid to ask for help!

Some people worry about asking for help because there can be stigma around mental health challenges. Some people worry about how others might see them. Asking for help means that you want to make changes and take care of yourself. It takes courage to ask for help.

If you are in crisis, unsure of what addictions or mental health service you may need, HERE 24/7 can help.

Call 1-844-437-3247 (HERE247) or visit: <https://here247.ca/>

There is also an online resource called Here4Help that includes useful tools and techniques to manage the stresses of dealing with COVID-19. www.here4help.ca.

[The Friendly Voice](#) program provides general wellbeing check-ins to support social connection and to reduce loneliness and isolation in the community. To register for the Friendly Voice program, call 519-743-6333.

Spiritual Supports

Discussions are taking place to support communication channels between government and faith based communities to help serve residents during the pandemic today, and years into the future.

Improv for Winter Wellbeing

Feeling like you could use some fun and connection? You're invited to join our second Improv for Winter Wellbeing! All are welcome to this session which will be hosted by [YesUnlimited](#).

You will not need to perform for this event, it is just for fun and connection. Please share this event with anyone you know of or work with who may enjoy! We hope to see you there! [Click this link to register](#).

Volunteer Services

The Pandemic Volunteer Program has 213 volunteers fully screened and vetted in the pool. Out of that number, 75 volunteers are working in Food Services and 33 in Housing and Homelessness. That is a total of 108 volunteers actively volunteering with one of the 10 agencies signed up for the program. With those 10 agencies, there are a total of 23 positions. Additionally there are 58 volunteers currently in the screening process and should be accepted soon.



3. Critical Infrastructure Control Group (CICG)

The Region of Waterloo, area Municipalities, electricity utilities, and telecommunications suppliers continue to maintain all critical services and maintain legislative requirements while performing these services. These services are critical and foundational to everyone's lives and businesses. Throughout the COVID Pandemic these services have been maintained and enhanced to ensure seamless and uninterrupted service. The majority of the public would have experience little or no change. The CICG has functioned in a coordinating role and has helped the suppliers of these critical services to share information, coordinate activities and help each other to maintain services. All of the services below are implementing methods to provide active COVID screening prior to work to meet the legislative requirements.

Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA)

GRCA has continued to provide its flood and other mandated service and has maintained its recreational areas during a summer that saw significantly increased demand. They have had to adapt both staffing and provision of service to safe guard both. Winter preparations are underway.

Waste Management

The waste transfer stations in Cambridge and Waterloo remain operational during normal operating hours of 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday to Saturday. However, our waste management offices remain closed to the public until further notice due to COVID-19 measures. Recycling, green bin and garbage collection continues as normal, however, yard waste collection has now ceased for the winter months and will resume again in late March/early April. The Region is providing green bins and blue boxes for new homeowners at the household hazardous waste drop off locations in Cambridge and Waterloo. We continue to ask that citizens remember to respect the environment and do not dump or burn garbage or yard waste.

Grand River Transit (GRT)

GRT would like to remind all riders that wearing a face covering is mandatory on GRT. That includes:

- GRT buses
- ION trains
- MobilityPLUS vehicles
- BusPLUS
- Kiwanis Transit
- Inside bus shelters
- On station platforms
- Inside GRT customer service locations

The By-Law is effective until May 31, 2021, unless extended by Regional Council.

GRT customer service locations; 105 King St. and Ainslie St. terminal are open to the public.



Customer Service Hours

Building Hours (105 King St. E & Ainslie Terminal)

8:00 am – 6:00 pm, Monday-Friday

9:30 am – 5:00 pm, Weekends/Holidays

Building Hours (Ainslie Terminal)

5:15 am – 12:45 am, Monday-Friday

6:00 am – 12:45 am, Saturday

7:30 am – 1:00 am, Sunday/Holidays

Customer service at 250 Strasburg Road remains closed to the public.

Details at www.grt.ca

Water/Wastewater

Water and wastewater services have been provided by the Region and local municipalities throughout the COVID pandemic without interruption and have maintained compliance with all legislation and regulation. All services are prepared for continued operation during Wave 2.

With business operations returning to buildings it is important that if you are a building owner and operator, you are responsible for the water quality in your building and should understand what could happen when water is left stagnant. The longer the building has low water use, the higher the risk for water quality issues. During COVID-19, reduced or no water use in buildings may present health risks. In most cases, flushing buildings with safe drinking water that has normal chlorine levels is sufficient for cleaning the water system. More information can be found on the [Region's website](#). A fact sheet is also available on important steps for re-opening your buildings water supply.

Transportation

Transportation services (Region and local municipalities) have continuously provided services during the COVID pandemic and preparations continue to ensure service through Wave 2 and as the transition to winter and snowy/icy weather happens. Region and local municipalities are also discussing back up plans should anyone municipality be unable to deliver service due to COVID impacting staff. These plans are not significantly different than what could happen in a more normal year and include coordinating any declaration of a significant snow event, sharing of staff and resources or even maintaining roads in other municipalities.

Electricity

Local utilities have maintained electricity service through the COVID pandemic. They have implemented programs to minimize risks to their staff and ensure no interruptions in service. Work for Wave 2 is ongoing.

Internet and Telephone/Cell Phone Suppliers

All of the companies involved in the supply of Internet and other communications services have maintained and increased service to address increases in Internet requirements caused by working from home and other COVID related business adaptations. They have implemented changes to protect staff and enhance service levels. Work for Wave 2 is ongoing.

4. Municipal Control Group (MCG)

The Chief Administrative Officers of all municipalities continue to meet frequently to discuss pertinent issues and to coordinate operational decisions on the local municipal response to COVID-19.

Closures, cancellations, news releases, important contacts, and frequently asked questions are found on the following municipal websites:

Region of Waterloo Response to COVID-19

<https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/living-here/covid-19-information-centre.aspx>

City of Cambridge's Response to COVID-19

<https://www.cambridge.ca/en/your-city/2019-novel-coronavirus.aspx#>

City of Kitchener's Response to COVID-19

<https://www.kitchener.ca/en/city-services/storm-and-emergency-updates.aspx#>

City of Waterloo's Response to COVID-19

<https://www.waterloo.ca/en/living/covid-19-response.aspx#>

Township of North Dumfries' Response to COVID-19

<https://www.northdumfries.ca/en/index.aspx>

Township of Wellesley's Response to COVID-19

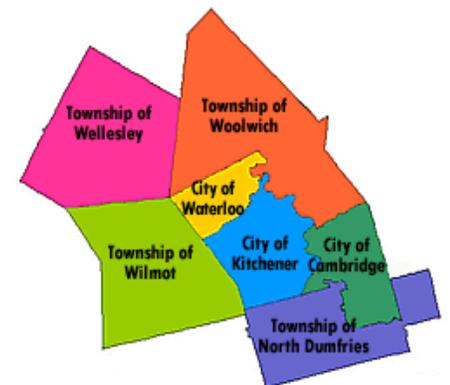
<https://www.wellesley.ca/en/living-here/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19.aspx#>

Township of Wilmot's Response to COVID-19

<https://www.wilmot.ca/en/township-office/coronavirus.aspx>

Township of Woolwich Response to COVID-19

<https://www.woolwich.ca/en/township-services/2019-novel-coronavirus.aspx#>



Please note: Because municipal facilities and administrative buildings are closed (with limited exceptions), all water, property tax and utility bills must now be paid online or by mail. Visit your local municipal website or call their contact centre for more information on how to do this.



5. Communications Control Group (CCG)

The Communications Control Group (CCG) meets to share relevant information about COVID-19 communications. The group is comprised of communication leaders from public sector organizations across Waterloo Region (hospitals, municipalities, school boards, post-secondary, police, BESTWR, etc.).

The Region and its partners in the community will begin a thank you campaign next week as a show of support and recognition for many people working in the emergency shelter system. The campaign, a collaboration between the Region and other organizations in the health care and housing and homelessness sector, will highlight the important work being done during the pandemic and the individuals behind this work who continue to inspire the community with their humanity and compassion.

Public Health and Corporate Communication teams continue to share important COVID-19 information with media, residents and staff through the [Region of Waterloo website](#), social media accounts and regular media briefings.

All complaints about compliance to COVID-19 orders should be directed to the [Region of Waterloo Call Center](#) – 24 hours /7 days per week at 519-575-4400