



Coordinated COVID-19 Response Newsletter

November 23, 2020

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 five other sector control groups which are described further 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 every two weeks 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.

Public Health Update from Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Hsiu-Li Wang:

Overall trends

- Regarding our daily number of new cases reported, we are still clearly over the thresholds for the Red Zone, and there is broad spread of COVID-19 in our community.
- As of November 19, there were 349 active cases of COVID-19 in the Region, surpassing our highest reported caseload from the spring.
- We have met the updated provincial thresholds for the indicators outlined under the Red-Control category of the Provincial framework.

COVID-19 Dashboard

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



- 
- Our current weekly incidence rate is 60 cases per 100,000
 - Our current per cent positivity taking into account interim data is 3.3 percent.
 - Our reproductive rate has fluctuated between 1.1 and 1.4
 - We have experienced some larger scale outbreaks, particularly in workplace and business settings
 - In the past week, our ability to contact cases within 24 hrs has dropped to as low as 50% (3-day moving average), but this is temporary as we continue to reallocate and reinforce our staffing.
 - Hospitalizations due to COVID-19 are increasing
 - Our hospitals will be at risk of being overwhelmed if this growth in COVID-19 hospitalizations continues.

The decision to move a region into a new category is made by the Provincial Cabinet and is done so in consultation with local municipal leaders and myself as the Medical Officer of Health. Given the recent acceleration in growth, which has led to multiple outbreaks, broad community spread, and a weekly incidence rate behind only Peel, Toronto and York (the three areas of the Province with the highest incidence rates), I advocated to the Province that Waterloo Region be placed in the Red-Control category.

Outbreaks and transmission

- COVID-19 spreads easily when you have close, unprotected contact
- This means that it is spreading in settings where face coverings are not worn and/or physical distance is not practiced.
- This is happening in social gatherings, between friends and family, and it's also happening in workplace settings and sports and recreation settings when measures are not practiced diligently.

At this time when the circulation of COVID-19 has never been higher in Waterloo Region, I continue to recommend for the time being that all residents stay home and only leave for essential purposes such as:

- Going to work
- Going to school
- Groceries or take-out
- Medical appointments
- Exercising, preferably outdoors
- Please avoid any social gatherings with friends, coworkers, and extended family. This includes birthday parties, sleepovers, playdates, coffee dates, game nights and dinner parties. Please avoid any of that.
- Limit your social interactions to only your household members, which can include one or two

For full briefing notes from weekly Public Health media briefings visit:
regionofwaterloo.ca/mediabriefings

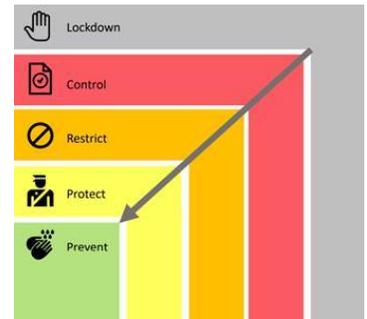
essential caregivers or supports for someone who is living alone.

Red-Control category

Given the continual increase in our case numbers and complexity of outbreaks over the past week, and a weekly incidence rate behind only Peel, Toronto and York (the three areas of the Province with the highest incidence rates), Waterloo Region is now in the Red-Control category. The goal of moving to Red is to implement broader-scale measures and restrictions across multiple sectors to control transmission. Some of the new intermediate measures under the Red-Control category would include all measures from previous levels as well as some significant changes which include:

- Limits for indoor public events and social gatherings would decrease to 5 people (previously 50) and outdoor public events would decrease to 25 people (previously 100).
- There are specific limits that would apply to restaurants, sports and recreational facilities, event spaces, retail, and other settings.
- Cinemas, excluding drive-ins, would be closed and performing arts facilities would be closed to spectators.

All measures for each previous level would still be required in the Red-Control category, such as required screening of patrons. It is recommended that businesses make plans for each level of the framework.



For details on the Red-Control measures visit <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-response-framework-keeping-ontario-safe-and-open#red>

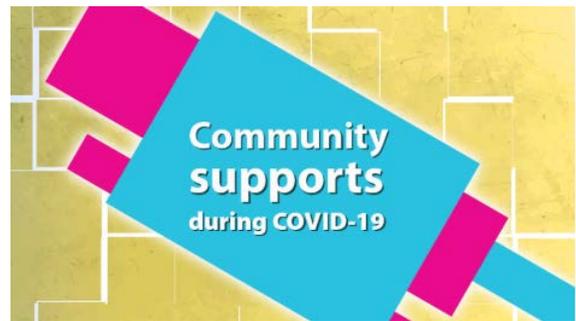
Health Sector Table:

Update on Assessment Centres—testing is not at capacity. Grand River Hospital is in the process of prepping the location for the winter drive through testing facility at the former Charles Street terminal. St. Mary’s is also looking for a new location for their assessment centre. Hospitals are continuing to see increases in COVID patients as overall numbers are rising. The Table discussed concern that outbreaks are occurring in settings largely related to social behaviours, participating in gatherings, not masking, not physically distancing. Reminding everyone of the need to follow Public Health measures is critical to slow the increasing numbers of cases.

Release of Social Determinants of Health data—This week, Public Health released an initial analysis of data collected from COVID positive cases between mid-July and mid-October. The data demonstrates that people who identify as visible minorities, as black, are living with low income, in large households and whose first language is not English or French are disproportionately affected with COVID compared to the overall population in Waterloo region. Public Health is currently preparing an application for federal funding to provide Voluntary Safe Isolation spaces in our community as well as looking to connect with community partners within the affected neighbourhoods to determine the best ways of supporting individuals and neighbourhoods to minimize their risk for COVID-19. The presentation for the data analysis can be found at <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/health-and-wellness/resources/Documents/Initial-Analysis-of-Socio-Demographic-Indicators-for-COVID-19-Cases.pdf>

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.

Food Services

Last week food services numbers include:

- 2,102 hampers were distributed throughout Waterloo Region, serving 5,746 individuals.
- 47 households accessed food assistance for the first time last week.
- Over 95,697 pounds of food were delivered to community programs and agency partners last week.
- The Community Food Assistance Network is currently aligning stages of support and responses with COVID-19 response framework presented by provincial government.
- We are working with community programs and agency partners to ensure continued service delivery throughout the Community Food Assistance Network. Visit: <https://www.thefoodbank.ca/network/map/> for an up-to-date list of available emergency food resources or share the [following resource poster](#) to locate a food assistance program.
- Christmas Hamper registration continues until November 30, 2020. Community members in Kitchener, Waterloo or Cambridge can register at: christmashampers.ca or by calling: 519 742-5860.

Housing Services and Homelessness

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

The community is working together to continue to protect people experiencing homeless from COVID-19 and to increase capacity in temporary accommodations in Kitchener, Cambridge, and Waterloo.

As of November 9, there were zero individuals experiencing homelessness accessing isolation / quarantine beds. The Sanguen bus continues to provide mobile health supports to community members experiencing homelessness. There have been over 7,600 mobile COVID assessments, 1,100 mobile medical assessments, and 100 COVID swabs.



Children's Services

Family Compass – Guiding you to services for children and youth

[Family Compass](#) is the go-to website for finding community-based services and supports for parents, youth and children in Waterloo Region. Check it out to learn about programs, services and resources available in Waterloo Region, including COVID-19 specific programs, services and resources. Don't know a lot about Family Compass? Hear how Family Compass has helped a local family and local youth in finding supports and services - <https://youtu.be/CF4OCweKlrw>

Foster Homes in Waterloo Region Needed

Family and Children's Services (FACS) is looking for foster homes in Waterloo Region. Approximately 40 additional foster families are needed to meet the current demand. This includes foster homes to provide short-term emergency foster care in the case a parent or guardian is unable to care for their children due to COVID-19, as well as more long-term foster care. [Learn more online](#) and [follow FACS on Twitter](#) to share their recruitment messages.

Keep Families Safe - Preventing Family Violence

Unmute: The Impact of a Pandemic on Gender-Based Violence

Unmute is a forum theatre production that addresses the rise of domestic violence and gender-based assault during COVID-19. Audiences will learn skills and resources for how they can make a difference. It is like a rehearsal for reality! Check this out to hear more about this Forum Theatre production!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMUWIDLXga4&feature=youtu.be>

There are four dates in November and December dates scheduled - more to come in the new year. [Register for free online.](#)

Porch Chats

The Waterloo Crime Prevention Council has hosted a series of Porch Chats to promote dialogue in a relaxed, constructive and welcoming environment that helps people to understand their neighbours and overcome barriers and myths preventing them from the creation of more connected communities. Two past Porch Chats are available online:

- Emotional Abuse and Precursors to Violence in the Home : Partnered with the Women's Crisis Services WR [Precursors to Violence in the Home: Recording](#)
- Becoming An Active Bystander: Partnered with MCC [Being and Active Bystander: Recording](#)

There are four more upcoming Porch Chats in different languages as part of the Keep Families Safe Campaign. More information and free registration visit the [Crime Prevention Council website](#).

Keeping Your Families Safe During Pandemic

The Coalition of Muslim Women KW developed Keeping Your Families Safe During Pandemic as Part of the #KeepFamiliesSafe Campaign. This program offering one-one and small group sessions on topics like stress management, parenting during pandemic, child abuse, domestic violence, and healthy relationships. Open to all, men, women, and youth and offered in 10 languages: English, Amharic,

Arabic, Dari, Farsi, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali, Tigrinya, Turkish, and Urdu. [Find out more online.](#)

Psychosocial & Spiritual Working Group

Psychosocial and spiritual [resources and support services](#) have been adjusted to respond to the emerging needs from the pandemic. If you are in crisis or 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/>

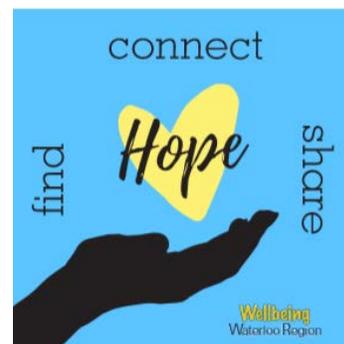
There is also a new online repository called Here4Help that includes useful tools and techniques to manage the stresses of dealing with COVID-19. www.here4help.ca

[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, please call 519-743-6333 and ask reception how to get started!

Finding Hope Movement

Finding and sharing our stories of hope, overcoming adversity and supporting one another during these past eight months can inspire us, reminding us that there is good in the world and that we are all connected, shining a light on the best of us.

Snap a picture, write about it, create a video, and then share it with us, with your organization, your community, your family. Find out more at <http://bit.ly/finding-hopeWWR> Follow WWR on social media. Post your own stories using #findinghopewwr



Animal Care Services

Animal Care services continue to provide a wide range services including pet food and emergency care during the pandemic.

Volunteer Services

The Pandemic Volunteer Program is in full swing with 129 volunteers fully screened and vetted in the pool. Out of that number, 55 volunteers are actively volunteering with an agency. We currently have 10 active agencies signed up with two more on the way. With those 10 agencies we have a total of 23 positions. In the past week we have recently had an uptake in applications, 58 additional volunteers have begun the screening process.

Waterloo Region's pandemic volunteer program is currently looking for drivers and kitchen help to ensure food deliveries can continue for people who are isolated due to COVID-19. Following Public Health guidelines, volunteer drivers and kitchen helpers must be 65 or younger and able to lift 30 pounds. Drivers must also have their own vehicle. Shifts are three to four hours each. The program is a partnership between the Region, area municipalities, and the Volunteering Action Centre. It launched during the first wave of the pandemic. Anyone interested in volunteering can apply at www.volunteerwr.ca.



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. They are now starting to prepare for winter.

Waste Management

The waste transfer stations in Cambridge and Waterloo continue to 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, yard waste and garbage collection continues as normal. The every second-week garbage bag/can limit increase from four to six bags ended October 2. 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, and since September 21, 2020 hours have been extended. Details at www.grt.ca

Hours of service for 105 King Street are:

8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, and
9:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., weekends and holidays.

Ainslie Street hours of service are:

5:15 a.m. – 12:45 a.m., Monday to Friday,
6:00 a.m. – 12:45 a.m., Saturday and 7:30 a.m. – 1:00 a.m. 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.

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. Continued preparations for Wave 2 are 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 and continue to prepare for Wave 2.

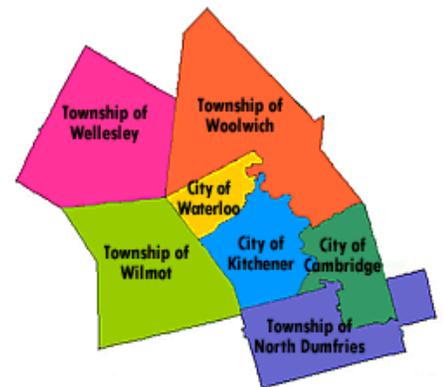
4. Municipal Control Group (MCG)

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. The following are some of the issues most recently considered by the Municipal Control Group:

- Continue to work with the Recreation & Programming Subgroup regarding recreation facilities and programs and the implications of moving from orange to red level
- Working with the Regional by-law/enforcement taskforce on implications of moving from orange to red levels under the new provincial response framework, and
- The CEMCs and Public Health have worked to finalize the warming centres throughout the Region in advance of the winter months

Municipal Services

All municipalities in Waterloo region are continuing to closely monitor the COVID-19 pandemic. The Region and all area municipalities have made significant changes to services and programming. 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#>



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.). Highlights from this week's activities include:

- Public Health is communicating messaging about the importance of dramatically reducing social interactions to help get COVID-19 under control in Waterloo Region.
- Messaging that explains what a red classification in the provincial framework means for sports and recreation in Waterloo Region will be distributed following any announcement from the Province.
- The Region, including Public Health as well as its municipal partners, will deliver key messages to the community around education and enforcement of COVID-19 health and safety rules that cover things like social distancing, mask wearing, hand hygiene, and staying home when symptomatic.
- Schools and municipalities are starting to develop plans and messaging for their communities in the event of a potential lockdown should COVID-19 numbers continue to climb.

Public Health and Corporate Communication teams continue to share important COVID-19 information with media, residents and staff through our 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