

Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health

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Medical Officer of Health Update

COVID-19 Update

As of June 9, 2022, all relevant indicators continue a downward trajectory. They include new cases of those eligible for testing, all severity indicators (deaths, hospitalizations, ICU admissions), percentage of positive cases, outbreaks in high-risk settings and outbreak-associated cases in high-risk settings. This declining trend is both provincial and local. Of note however, is a sharp increase in the number of cases in Northwestern Health Unit.

While most COVID-19 cases are the BA.2 variant, there continues to be an increase in the proportion of BA.2.12.1 cases identified through representative surveillance. Other variants such as BA.4 and BA.5 are also circulating but to a lesser extent. Currently, the full impact regarding transmissibility, severity, and immune evasion of these other variants is unknown and further study is ongoing.

Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) Class Order: Masking

The Class Order made on April 27, 2022, by the CMOH pursuant to Section 22 under Section 77.1 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (HPPA) that required masking in certain settings will expire - as originally communicated in April 2022 - as of 12:00 a.m. on June 11, 2022.

Though no longer required under a Chief Medical Officer of Health Class Order, masking will continue to be required in long-term care homes and retirement homes through other mechanisms. In addition, acute care and congregate care/living settings guidance continues to recommend masking in these settings.

Remaining mask directives at hospitals and other health-care spaces will also end on June 11. Those directives will be replaced by guidance to be issued by the health ministry for workers in those settings.

Immunization Update

Vaccine uptake continues to be low with most immunizations being fourth doses in the 18+ age group. Clinics are being offered throughout the district by a variety of means including the mobile bus targeting vulnerable individuals with access challenges.

There is still no new information on the vaccine status for those between the ages of 6 months and 5 years of age. Similarly, there is no timeline for the proposed bivalent Omicron vaccine other than the possibility of it being available in the fall or late 2022.

Monkeypox

The virus continues to spread around the world. Canada is reporting approximately 100 cases of monkeypox. The majority being in Quebec. Ontario has eight confirmed cases in Toronto and one now in Halton. There are no confirmed cases in the North Bay Parry Sound District as of June 9, 2022, and no vaccinations required.



Influenza

The unusual increase in influenza cases was significant in May but has slowed initially in June. There have been no outbreaks declared to date and no deaths reported.

Programs and Services Updates

Corporate Services

Building and Maintenance

- Planning for upcoming closure of Burk's Falls facility.
- Weekly monitoring of PPE cleaning supplies for COVID-19 (sanitizer and disinfectant).
- 345 Oak Street parking lot spring maintenance was completed.
- 345 Oak Street – seasonal grounds maintenance contract secured.
- Assisted the Health Living team with teaching kitchen set up to resume client use.

Communications

- Communications has entered a transitional period with the move from mainly COVID-19 activities to program work. This transition has allowed Communications to proctor third-year nursing students from Nipissing University as they learned about health and communication promotional activities. The work resulted in the creation of five TikTok and two Instagram posts, which can be found on each platform under the Health Unit's username IMPACT_HU. Communications works jointly with the IMPACT team to ensure engaging, accurate, and meaningful messaging is disseminated across all the Health Unit's social media channels.
- Other projects include the Stay on Your Feet seniors walking campaign in Mattawa and the "Think You'll Win" gambling campaign. Communications is also working closely with Healthy Living on harm reduction activities, in addition to promoting health and safety messages from other programs.
- To ensure the Health Unit is up to date with website accessibility and function, Communications is project managing the internal requirements to update the website this year. The new website is on track to launch in November 2022.

Emergency Preparedness

Manage/coordinate Health Unit emergency response activities:

- Emergency Management work continues in support of COVID-19 response, primarily focused on Incident Management System (IMS), municipality liaisons, and support for the immunization strategy, as well as internal emergency preparedness with a main focus on staff safety.
- Managing responsibilities for the COVID-19 Call Centre (general and vaccine bookings).
- Represents the Health Unit at regular municipal emergency control group meetings and is responding to inquiries from municipal leaders and provincial partners.
- Working closely with the Immunization Strategy Team to coordinate and plan COVID-19 vaccine clinics within the municipalities and is now focused on smaller municipalities with the COVID-19 Vaccination Bus operational again.

Information Technology

- Call center implementation/configuration/training/support.

- Application rollout training of new phone system.
- Termination of final PRI (Primary Rate Interface) new phone system migration savings.
- Supported Human Resources for increased new hire orientations.
- Support the upcoming upgrade of the Finance / Human Resources / Payroll systems.
- Environmental Health and Healthy Families programs laptop refresh.
- Ongoing support for the Board of Health virtual meetings.
- Transition to Microsoft Azure Storage Blob off-site backup for Disaster Recovery.

Planning and Evaluation

Population Health Assessment and Surveillance

- Analytical and methodological knowledge and learnings were shared among staff to continue the maintenance of the public-facing COVID-19 dashboard and routine COVID-19 related data products, given the departure of one epidemiologist. A Master of Public Health practicum student has joined the team until August, with work beginning on a climate change vulnerability & adaptation assessment for the Nipissing and Parry Sound districts.
- Information collected through the Overdose Reporting System is sent to more than 160 community partners in weekly updates through the Health Unit's interactive [surveillance dashboard](#). The Health Unit also continues to collect data based on the increasing trends noted locally during the pandemic.

Health Equity:

- In collaboration with community partners providing trusted community spaces, continue to support COVID-19 vaccine clinics to reach individuals who are underhoused, transient, or experiencing homelessness; individuals who use substances; and newcomers to Canada.

Planning

- The Health Unit's strategic recovery priorities are being re-framed to leverage some of the internal initiatives already taking place across the organization as well as both existing and planned program work, in order to address the backlog of needs that have accumulated since the beginning of the pandemic. Accountability measures will be built into existing program planning templates to capture 2022-23 work and we will explore opportunities to make a collective impact across programs on these priorities.

Quality Assurance

Policies and Procedures

- Two operational policy mapping sessions took place to establish a framework of operational policies as the organization continues to implement its enhanced quality management system. Next steps are to finalize and endorse the framework, as well as create a tool to support programs transitioning their work instructions to the new system.
- Totals for policies, procedures, and associated documents issued between January 1 and May 31, 2022, are: 67 documents issued, and 30 new documents assigned.

Quality Issue Reports (QIR)

- Total QIRs completed (closed) between January 1 and May 31, 2022, are 41: 7 at level 0, 27 at level 1, and 7 at level 2.
- Classifications are as follows: 21 impacting people (third party, personnel, or client), 12 related to organizational/professional standards, 7 related to resources, and 1 related to reputation.

Clinical Services

Communicable Disease Control

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be the focus of the Communicable Disease Control (CDC) program. COVID-19 outbreaks in highest risk settings and congregate living settings and case management for individuals linked to these settings continue to be managed by the Health Unit. In 2022, the CDC program has managed 81 COVID-19 outbreaks in high-risk settings throughout the district.

The CDC program continues to manage enteric and respiratory outbreaks and complete case management and contact tracing for other diseases of public health significance.

The Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Hub is fully implemented and supporting congregate living settings. In May 2022 our IPAC staff had 308 interactions with congregate living settings. These interactions include discussions regarding outbreak management, IPAC assessments, exposure assessments, and consultations regarding admissions and transfers.

Professional Practice

The Professional Practice Manager was fully deployed to COVID-19 response until late March and has just recently transitioned back to Professional Practice. As many staff are now returning from their deployed roles, and programs are returning to normal business, there has been an increase in the number of consultation requests related to privacy, professional practice, and student placements. Improved capacity in this role has allowed increased focus and response on issues related to privacy and professional practice. This has resulted in work being done on streamlining procedures and moving them into the new policy and procedure format. A procedure has been published related to Managing Privacy Breaches, and a procedure on Managing Requests Under *Personal Health Information Protection Act* legislation is in the review process by the Policy and Procedure Advisory Group. The Quality of Practice procedure is currently in review by the Policy and Procedure Advisory Group and then will be sent to the Executive Team for final review and request for approval.

There has been close collaboration with several educational institutions in Ontario seeking student placements. Over the last three months the Health Unit has welcomed 17 individuals in student placements. The Manager liaises most closely with local educational institutions; Nipissing University, Canadore College, and Northern Ontario School of Medicine and is in the process of negotiating placements for nurses, dietetic interns, social workers, teachers, and public health students for the upcoming September intake.

Oral Health & Vision Screening

As part of the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), the Health Unit typically offers dental screening annually to junior and senior kindergarten (JK, SK) and grade 2 students in all schools. JK, SK, grade 2, and 7 students in medium-risk schools, and JK, SK, grade 2, 4, and 7 students in high-risk schools.

However, the dental screening program has been on hold since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As COVID-19 precautions gradually began lifting, the screening program resumed in district schools in March of this year. With just a few months left of this school year, the Oral Health team focused their efforts on screening grade 2 students, in the hope of catching the SK students that were not screened in 2020, and to determine risk levels of schools moving forward. Over a period of 10 weeks, the team visited 50 of 53 schools across the district and screened 900 grade 2 children. Of those, 174 of these students were identified as requiring emergency and/or essential oral health services and were referred for treatment. The plan is to resume the full oral health screening program in the 2022/2023 school year.

In 2021, services offered through our Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) were reduced part way through the year due to budget constraints. By direction from the Ministry of Health (Ministry), an increase in base funding for OSDCP was requested in the 2022 budget proposal and was subsequently approved in the Ministry funding agreement in May. The increased funding will allow the Oral Health team to meet the demand of approximately 250 sets of dentures, continue to provide dental care with specialists, and provide dental care in rural parts of the district through purchased services with partnering dentists.

Additionally, capital funding was requested, and approved, specific to the Oral Health program at the Parry Sound Branch Office. This funding will allow us to expand expansion of services to the southern part of the district and reduce the amount of travel required for seniors accessing the OSDCP. An internal committee has been formed to begin this building process, with anticipated completion by the end of 2023.

Sexual Health/Clinical Information

Public health nurses from the Health Unit and several staff from the AIDS Committee of North Bay & Area (ACNBA) held a collaborative outreach testing clinic on May 13, 2022, at The Gathering Place in North Bay. A total of 18 tests were completed for the detection of Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV), hepatitis C (HCV), and/or syphilis. Additionally, naloxone kits and other harm reduction supplies were available to all in attendance.

The continued collaboration between ACNBA and the Health Unit allows for the sharing of resources to plan, organize, promote, and hold the event. This valuable partnership allows for the mutually beneficial integration of services, such as, ACNBA's mobile clinic van, and established relationships, such as, the Gathering Place.

Vaccine Preventable Diseases

As part of the organizations COVID-19 recovery process, the Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPD) team continues to target school-aged students who are overdue for routine immunizations and recommended grade 7 vaccine series. To date, we have hosted 17 in-school clinics and 4 weekend community hub clinics across the district. To maximize reach and uptake, in collaboration with the Call Centre, a majority of families who received notices have also received a follow-up phone call from us to remind them of clinic times and to offer alternative appointment times.

Similar to schools, according to Ministry guidelines, all childcare immunization records for children and staff must be reviewed annually. This review took place in the spring and is complete for 2022.

Community Services

Environmental Health

Vaping has been identified as a preoccupying issue in schools since the resumption of in-class learning after the interruption caused by the COVID 19 pandemic. Tobacco enforcement officers and community health promoters are dealing with parents, students, and school officials of the four school boards in the district, addressing vaping issues on school properties. A progressive enforcement approach is being used, starting first with educating the students and their parents about *Smoke-Free Ontario Act, 2017* regulations. The complexity of handling vaping in school washrooms whereby smoke dissipates quickly, small vaping devices can be easily hidden, and students' privacy and underage status represent challenges in dealing with complaints.

Environmental Health is launching the 2022 summer beach season. The Board of Health is mandated to manage all qualifying beaches that are within its district. Public health inspectors have completed the survey with all municipalities of concern. On June 20, 2022, all beaches that are within the Health Unit district will be sampled to ensure that indicator bacteria loads are within the standards and are safe for the enjoyment of recreational activities in our natural water bodies. Beach water test results are posted on the Health Unit's website. The Health Unit participates in the Great Lakes recreational water quality monitoring.

Special attention will be given to the Olmstead Beach this year due to the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) report of elevated levels of PFAS in foam, specifically in Lees Creek. Although, the fate of PFAS compounds remains unknown to date, the Health Unit would like to ensure that necessary precautions are being taken. Public health inspectors have informed lifeguards to watch for foam and, if found to scoop it away, monitor it and ensure that children are not exposed to it. The inspectors of MECP plan to collect foam samples around this beach when the conditions are favourable because of its proximity to Lees Creek.

Healthy Families

On June 1, 2022, the Health Unit teaching kitchen opened for the first time since closing in March of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic allowing programs like Mothercare to recommence in-person.

Mothercare is a weekly program run in partnership with Children's Aid Society, that serves prenatal mom's and babies up to 2 months old. The program is now offered in a hybrid model of in-person and virtual. The program will resume to fully in-person programming on June 29th, 2022. The Health Unit is in the process of reaching out to other community partners to invite them back to the teaching kitchen.

The Health Unit has provided support via the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health to Health Canada to the development of communication on the recent shortage of infant formulas for babies with food allergies and certain medical conditions across Canada. It is anticipated that the shortage will continue for the next several months and ongoing communication will be needed to inform families. The Health Unit will be supporting this messaging through our website and social media posts.

The family home visitors have returned to the Healthy Families program following deployment and are in the process of re-integration into the Healthy Babies Healthy Children blended home visiting program. Health promotion work is now in the recovery planning phase with re-instating of various working groups and projects.

Healthy Living

Seniors Month

June is Seniors Month in Ontario, and the theme this year is Stay Active, Connected, and Safe. To celebrate Seniors Month, the Health Unit together with Stay On Your Feet (SOYF), The Village and West Parry Sound Campus of Canadore College, and CareLink Advantage & Helpline are hosting two free in-person vendor fairs titled *Learning and Caring for Yourself as you Age*.

The two events will aim to raise awareness of the programs and supports available to assist older adults in living independently and remaining social across the North Bay Parry Sound district.

In addition to these vendor events SOYF, in partnership with the Town of Mattawa has also launched *Spring in Your Step*, a six-week pilot walking campaign to encourage older adults to stay active and social in Mattawa and surrounding area. The campaign launched on May 11, 2022, with an education session hosted at the Mike Rodden Arena where participants were able to register for the pilot and pick up their SOYF pedometer and healthy aging resources. In total, 95 resource bags and pedometers were distributed to individuals 55 years of age and older in Mattawa. By participating in the campaign, individuals benefit from the positive impacts of walking and are eligible to enter a draw for local prizes. An evaluation will be completed at the end of the campaign to support the implementation of similar programs in other communities across the district.



Healthy Schools

Building Capacity for Outdoor Learning

The pandemic heightened the benefits of outdoor-based learning environments and it was included as a model within recommendations by [Sick Kids](#) (July 29, 2020), [Sustain Ontario](#) (July 27, 2020), and the Ministry of Education [Reopening Schools Guide](#) (July 30, 2020).

Nature-based learning is defined as child-directed, play and inquiry-based learning that happens in the outdoors, whereby children go outdoors on a regular and repeated basis over an extended period of time⁽¹⁾. Children who engage in active outdoor learning in natural settings demonstrate “...enhanced environmental stewardship, increased risk-taking skills, better self-regulation skills, improved mental health, increased confidence, advanced gross motor skills, increased imaginative play, greater resiliency.”⁽¹⁾ [Forest and Nature Schools in Canada](#) is one such model providing nature-based learning.

In supporting the school boards in accordance with the OPHS School Health Guideline, the Health Unit worked along side Near North District School Board, Canadian Ecology Centre (CEC), and the Child & Nature Alliance of Canada (CNAC) to plan and coordinate the first in-person [Forest School Practitioners Course](#)

within the Nipissing District. The course, held on May 24-25 and June 4-5, 2022, had facilitators from CNAC who demonstrated commitment to **Truth Telling and Reconciliation** “by centering Indigenous voices in the practitioner course” with local Elders and Knowledge Keepers participating in the course facilitation. Twenty-five participants attended the course from school boards, post-secondary, childcare centers, and the CEC. The Forest School Practitioners certification is gaining credibility and recognition in the education and childcare sector across Canada.

This professional development opportunity for our education partners continues to build on past outdoor learning initiatives supported by the Health Unit including:

- **Below Zero** learning event in February 2020 held at Canadore College. All school boards partners and District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board were involved in the planning and delivery. The purpose was to explore how to bring learning outdoor during the winter.
- **Outdoor Ways of Learning and Sharing (OWLS)** offers curriculum-linked outdoor learning experiences to students and provided professional development for educators. The delivery of OWLS professional development is a collaboration between the school boards, the Health Unit and the Canadian Ecology Centre.

(1) A Canadian Perspective of Outdoor and Nature-Based Learning: <https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Infographic-final-version.pdf>

Finance

- Prepared Ministry settlement documents for the 2021 year-end and forwarded to the auditors in preparation for the June 30 deadline.
- Disseminated the annual information returns to member municipalities
- Filed the fourth quarter report for Healthy Babies Healthy Children funding from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services on June 15.
- Reconciled Board approved budgets to the Ministry 2022 funding approvals, which included finding costs-savings and implementing the budget adjustments in the electronic accounting system.
- Reconciled all one-time funding that expired on March 31 and the produced the necessary reporting.
- Submitted costs related to the North Bay COVID-19 Community Isolation Centre to the Public Health Agency of Canada for reimbursement.
- Submitted the Annual Charity Return T3010 to the Canada Revenue Agency.
- Provided supported related to ongoing union negotiations.
- Work related to upgrading the accounting system to a Cloud-based system is on-going.

Human Resources

Compensation

Under the Provincial Temporary Retention Incentive for Nurses, eligible nurses were provided the first retention payment in the month of May. The eligibility period is related to work performed between February 13, 2022, to March 19, 2022 (1st eligibility period), and March 20, 2022, to April 22, 2022 (2nd eligibility period). Nurses must be employed as a practicing nurse by an eligible employer on March 31, 2022, to receive the first payment and on September 1, 2022, to receive the second payment.

Employee & Labour Relations

Meetings with the OPSEU Negotiations Committee and the Management Negotiations Committee were held on June 1 and 2, 2022. Meetings regarding OPSEU negotiations were scheduled for June 16 and June 24, 2022. Meetings with the ONA Negotiations Committee are scheduled on September 7, 8, 9, and 16, 2022. A Joint OPSEU/ONA/Management committee meeting will be held on June 23, 2022.

Occupational Health and Safety

As we experience a decline in reported COVID-19 cases and transition to a period of lower risk of transmitting COVID-19, we made significant changes to our COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan to outline various measures to consider when doing certain activities. Remote work options, active screening, and client/staff masking in clinical areas continue. These measures will be reviewed over the summer months and into the fall. Masking requirements continue for staff under certain circumstances only, i.e., returning to work following self-isolation, as personal protective equipment based on personal risk assessment, and while providing clinical care to a client; otherwise, masking is not required. Those who choose to continue wearing a mask/face covering based on their personal risk assessment are encouraged to do so.

Professional Development

Internal professional development sessions recently coordinated by Human Resources include:

Date	Professional Development Session	Number of Participants
May 13, 2022	De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations	2
May 18, 2022	De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations	5

Staffing

Human Resources continues to schedule casual nurses, COVax assistants and COVID-19 clinic assistants to work at COVID-19 immunization clinics across the district.

The following temporary positions were recently filled. These vacancies were created as a result of backfilling employees assigned to temporary job assignments and to assist with workload:

- Technical coordinator, Information Technology (0.60 FTE) from June 7, 2022, to October 28, 2022
- Public health nurse, Communicable Disease Control (1.00 FTE) from June 14, 2022, to December 9, 2022
- Public health nurse, Sexual Health and Clinical Information (1.00 FTE) from July 4, 2022, to December 30, 2022
- Public health nurse, Communicable Disease Control (1.00 FTE) effective date to be determined

The following permanent positions were recently filled. These vacancies were created because of resignations:

- Public health nurse, Healthy Families (1.00 FTE) effective May 9, 2022
- Bilingual program administrative assistant, Vaccine Preventable Diseases (1.00 FTE) effective June 20, 2022

The recruitment of the following permanent and temporary positions is currently under way:

- Public health nurse, Sexual Health and Clinical Information (0.40 FTE)
- Public health nurses, Sexual Health and Clinical Information (Casual-2)
- Public health inspectors, Environmental Health (2.00 FTE)
- Community health promoters, Healthy Schools (2.00 FTE)
- Assistant program manager, Healthy Families (1.00 FTE)
- Senior public health nurse, Vaccine Preventable Diseases (1.00 FTE)
- Bilingual program administrative assistant, Oral Health and Vision Screening (1.00 FTE)
- Community health promoter, Healthy Living (1.00 FTE)

We continue our efforts to recruit a temporary certified dental assistant-level II, Oral Health and Vision Screening, and a permanent epidemiologist, Planning and Evaluation.

There has been a net increase of a 1.0 FTE permanent position of certified dental assistant-level II. This is a new position created with 100% funding related to the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP).

Approved by

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