

# Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health

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# Medical Officer of Health Update

## COVID-19 Update

### *Cases*

Due to changes in the availability of testing, driven by increasing COVID-19 cases related to the Omicron variant, case counts provincially and locally are an underestimate of the true number of individuals with COVID-19. Actual cases have been estimated to be two to four times higher. The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit has the lowest case rate per 100,000 in the province.

The Omicron variant has proven to be much more infectious than previous variants resulting in widespread community transmission. This has shifted the focus away from case numbers and containment to mitigation strategies preventing severe disease to protect those at greatest risk and the health care system from being overwhelmed. As a result, important indicators currently include hospitalizations, ICU admissions, deaths, and percent positivity rates.

While this past week has seen a modest increase in hospitalizations (8%) there is cautious optimism that the admission rate has stabilized or plateaued provincially and may decline over the next couple of weeks. The Health Unit district currently has two hospitalized patients.

Throughout Ontario and locally, there continues to be ongoing community outbreaks most predominant in congregate settings. The North Bay Jail outbreak is the largest with 127 confirmed, 1 probable and 8 suspect cases.

### *Case and Contact Management*

The number of Omicron cases has risen rapidly in Ontario and locally such that individuals with symptoms indicative of COVID-19 can be presumed to be infected with COVID-19 and individuals have the responsibility to initiate timely self-isolation to prevent further transmission in the community.

Public Health has prioritized case and contact/outbreak management in high-risk settings. Efforts focus on measures to protect the most vulnerable as previously outlined.

### *Testing*

With the Omicron surge, prioritization of testing became imperative due to capacity and to maximize the use of limited resources. The Health Unit's website lists the indications for testing of both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals and the type of test to be employed (molecular or rapid antigen testing).

### *Vaccinations*

Vaccines continue to be highly effective in preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death. Immunizations accompanied with public health measures offers the best protection against the Omicron variant.

Achieving high first and second dose coverage remains the focus and main priority of the Ontario's COVID-19 vaccination program. In response to the changing risk posed by the Omicron variant, accelerated deployment of COVID19 boosters may provide increased protection across the population.

Recent vaccination priorities include 4<sup>th</sup> doses for high-risk settings such as Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, Elder Care First Nations, and older adults living in congregate settings providing assisted living and health services. It is anticipated that these settings will be completed by the end of January.

With back-to-school having commenced, immunizations are taking place at selected schools throughout the district in collaboration with school boards. After hours, evenings, and weekend clinics were determined to best meet the needs of the children and their parents. Allowing walk-ins has been welcomed by the community and proven to be successful.

It is anticipated that over the next couple of months Public Health efforts will continue to prioritize immunizations. Recovery plans are being formulated but not yet at a point of implementation.

#### *Website Data Display Update*

The Health Unit's website displaying the district's COVID-19 Status Report has been updated to provide more meaningful data pertaining to priority indicators. These include currently and ever hospitalized for COVID-19 statistics, new and total cases, active and resolved cases, percent positivity, and deaths due to COVID-19. Information regarding outbreaks, testing, and vaccinations is also displayed and updated daily.