

General Report

1. Board of Health (BOH)

Strengthening Public Health

The Ministry of Health (MOH) has extended an invitation to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), and to Board of Health (BOH) members through the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) for a webinar to provide information and facilitate a two-way dialogue with the Ministry of Health about the government's *Strengthening Public Health Strategy*, with an update on progress, and discussion of common questions raised by municipal partners to date. Other opportunities for Local Public Health Agency (LPHA) staff leading merger work will include a Lessons Learned Speaker Series featuring an ongoing panel of local public health sector colleagues, as well as a Community of Practice.

Corporate Services

1. Human Resources

Recruitment

Since the last Board of Health meeting, two full-time permanent Administrative Assistants have been hired for the Timcor building. Additionally, a new Public Health Dietician was hired in Cochrane. Over the same period, there were two new resignations, one Administrative Assistant in Iroquois Falls and a Health Promoter in Timmins. The recent Program Coordinator vacancy created by an internal promotion has also been filled with a start to be determined.

Staffing Summary - Vacancies

Staffing Summary to November 30, 2023:

- Three Public Health Nurses
- Administrative Assistant
- Public Health Inspector

Professional Development & Health and Safety

With clinics winding down, there has been a focus back to restart the Crisis Protection Institute (CPI) training for staff in Timmins. To date, a total of 46 people have received this important training. A roll-out of this training for Branch offices will commence in the new year.

Labour Relations

The BOH ratified the newly negotiated CUPE contract at their last meeting. The team looks forward to a collaborative three years of Labour Relations with both CUPE and ONA.

2. Information Technology (IT) and Records Management

Bercell Integrated Technologies continues to monitor PHU IT systems 24/7, update IT equipment to protect from cyber-attacks and breaches and increase efficient operations as well as support installation and configuration of new hardware. Network upgrades were worked on in the Pine building Sunday December 3rd, including updates to hardware and installing new wireless access points, while WIFI on the main floor still requires a bit of work. Timcor building upgrades

will be scheduled in the coming week to occur after hours. Due to being at the end of life, the internet switches in all offices have been replaced. In addition to tremendous work updating the IT infrastructure and systems, the team completed 92 IT tickets in November.

Access to Information Requests

Clients who want a copy of the health unit record must submit their request in writing. The Porcupine Health Unit complies with relevant privacy legislation to complete the requests received within 30 days. These requests are reported to the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario on an annual basis. In November 2023, no requests have been received and completed.

Requests for information from third parties with client consent are received frequently but do not need to be reported to the Information Commissioner of Ontario. Requests are most often received from the Cochrane Temiskaming Resource Centre and the Office of the Children's Lawyer.

3. 2023 Ministry of Health Public Health Funding

Public health units can submit 2023-24 additional one-time funding (at 100%) as part of an in-year request process. The Ministry shared a business case template to request funds for the Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Adult Prevention Program; Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) – Extraordinary Costs; and merger planning. The PHU has submitted a one-time request for both the RSV and OSDCP; as the THU and PHU already have merger support funding secured.

Vaccine Preventable Diseases and COVID-19 Response Program

1. Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPD)

During the month of November, each branch office offered routine immunization clinics, focusing on the delivery of vaccines to the general population. The total number of clients seen across all branch offices in our routine VPD clinics amounts to 123, with a total of 211 vaccines were administered in these clinics. This does not include COVID-19 nor influenza.

2. COVID-19 Response

Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) remain available and free of charge at all PHU offices across the region for community members and partners, as well as at all vaccine clinics. Communications have been disseminated to community partners across the PHU region about acquiring RATs through the health unit. The PHU remains committed to ensuring adequate supply as it is available from the province for the region and are working with health care partners to ensure communications are shared for the availability of treatment for those eligible.

3. Local COVID-19 and Influenza Activity

The PHU continues to provide surveillance through the updated Integrated Respiratory Surveillance System (IRSS), launched in late September. To keep the community informed and engaged, weekly respiratory virus updates are provided on Facebook and the PHU website. The individualized respiratory assessment is aimed at helping community members and partners make informed decisions to protect themselves and others from respiratory viruses.

Influenza has now been reported in the PHU district as well, and this information has been shared via media release to all communities, and with community partners.

<https://www.porcupinehu.on.ca/en/your-health/infectious-diseases/respiratory-illnesses>

4. Fall Respiratory Vaccine Program: COVID-19, Influenza, RSV

The month of November saw significant achievements in the flu and COVID-19 vaccination efforts. The flexible approach, community collaboration, and commitment to overcoming barriers like transportation have significantly contributed to the success of the vaccine blitz. The PHU remains the leading organization for the administration of COVID-19 and flu vaccines across the district. In certain areas, the PHU is the sole provider of flu and covid clinics. Across the region, more than 4500 covid doses and more than 3200 flu doses have been administered by the PHU team.

Clinic Scheduling

Across the region, clinics were offered at various times throughout the week, including evenings and weekends, to ensure accessibility for all community members. In response to increased demands for vaccine uptake, additional clinics were set up across the region, demonstrating PHU's ongoing adaptability and commitment to meeting community needs.

Clinic Locations

While most clinics were hosted in PHU offices and community halls, Timmins clinics were also hosted as mobile pop-up clinics at the DSBONE school board office, Science Timmins, Timmins Square and Northern College. This strategic choice of venues played a crucial role in enhancing accessibility and ensuring a welcoming environment for all clients.

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)

The PHU has been actively engaging with long-term care homes (LTCHs) to highlight the importance of the RSV vaccine. This includes educational efforts and advocacy to encourage vaccination among residents. This initiative aligns with the province's introduction of the RSV vaccination program for high-risk adults. While the uptake of the RSV vaccine has not been as high as anticipated, the PHU remains committed to increased advocacy. In response to varying demand, the PHU continues to provide flexibility in distributing the vaccine to LTCHs as they request it.

Key Messages for the Influenza, COVID-19, RSV and Respiratory Season

Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) of Ontario spoke to several media outlets this week about the current state of the respiratory season and the importance of getting vaccinated, with messages that aligned well with the PHU media release announcing the arrival of influenza in the region (previously shared with the BOH via email).

Key Messages include:

- We continue to closely monitor respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, influenza and RSV.
- As we prepare for the holiday season, please protect yourselves and your loved ones by getting vaccinated for influenza, COVID-19 and RSV, if eligible.
- Influenza vaccines and appointments continue to be available through pharmacies and primary health care providers.
- It's not too late to get your vaccines to protect your families and communities and enjoy a safe and happy holiday season.
- Layers of protection:
 - Wearing a tight-fitted, well constructed mask in indoor public settings for anyone at highest risk of severe infection and when in health-care settings/places with mask policies.

- Stay home when you are sick and wear a mask until day 10 from symptom onset
- Wash your hands often
- Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze
- Regularly cleaning high-touch surfaces
- Optimizing indoor air quality
- If you are at high-risk, speak with your health care provider about antiviral treatment options in case you get sick

Health Promotion

1. Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention (CDIP)

Workplace Wellness

In an effort to enhance accessibility of health information in the context of workplace wellness, the Chronic Disease team has been adapting and developing health-related toolkits. These toolkits cover a range of topics, including sleep health, ultraviolet (UV) protection, and tobacco use in workplace settings. In line with these efforts, the lead delivered an informative presentation on workplace wellness to a group of 15 individuals through Northern College's Youth Job Connection program.

2. Healthy Growth and Development

Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, HBHC Public Health Nurses' (PHN's) were suspended from conducting screening liaison work in the three birthing hospitals in the PHU region. This suspension occurred in March 2020, due to the significant demands for public health staff in the pandemic response.

The role of a hospital screening liaison PHN is to conduct the universal post-partum HBHC screening tool with birthing families at the hospital bedside. This is the first step in identifying families and children who may be with risk to compromised healthy child development or parenting, and who would benefit from an in-depth assessment. With the increased demands put on hospital staff, the PHU recognized that there was an increase rate in families declining the consent (29.3%) or were not offered a consent at all (29.8%). Clients who decline the consent or are not offered a consent to complete post-partum HBHC screening do not receive any post-partum/infant feeding follow-up from the PHU. This is a missed opportunity to identify families with risk factors that can compromise responsive Parent-Child relationships for optimal child development and to increase breastfeeding duration rates.

In the spring of 2022, PHN's were able to return to the hospital bedside to conduct this important HBHC screening. Several meetings were held with area hospitals to discuss how to increase screen completion rates. PHU staff updated the HBHC consent form to make it easier to read and understand from a client's perspective. The consent form was also included in prenatal packages provided by delivering doctors in the Timmins area. PHU staff developed a sample script on offering the consent form to families. PHU staff provided several in-service sessions to front line hospital nurses in the spring, summer and fall of 2023. In services reviewed the importance of offering the consent to all birthing families, how to complete and submit HBHC screens to the PHU, services that the PHU offers for families. The HBHC coordinator completed quarterly reviews of completed, decline, and missed screening rates over the year in 2023. Quarter 3 revealed an increase in completed screens each month, and a decrease rate of missed screening (< 10%) and in the month of

September, every birthing family at TADH was offered a consent form. The final quarter is to be reviewed in January 2025 to fully evaluate the interventions implemented in 2023 and to determine how we can continue to improve screening completion rates to ensure we are reaching our most vulnerable families.

3. School Health

Concussion and Injury Prevention

In collaboration with the PHU School Team and the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) students at Northern College, the Brain Waves program was delivered to two elementary schools. This initiative was offered to two grade 5 classes (32 students) and includes an interactive concussion awareness workshop facilitated by 5 BScN students per session. Early response from educators, the grade 5 students, the PHU school nurses, and the BScN students has been positive, and indicates a strong engagement and interest from the grade 5 students. Additional workshops are planned for January in two more schools, with a more comprehensive evaluation and debrief to follow.

The injury prevention team introduced the You-Can Concussion Awareness Program to school boards across the region. The concept of the You-CAN program is straightforward: it offers a framework and resources that enable students to learn about concussions alongside their peers and to offer support to them. Participating high schools across the country engage by forming student-led committees who meet regularly to develop and implement strategies within the schools, to educate their peers about concussions. You-CAN's overarching goal is to change Canadian students' behaviours specific to reporting a suspected concussion to an adult; and, supporting their peers who experience a concussion. One local high school has shown interest in the program, and a presentation on the implementation of the You-Can program was offered to 35 of their cooperative education and health students. Following the presentation, the students were encouraged to review the program's content and consider registering as peer advocates. The process for students to register as peer advocates in the program is currently underway with 3 students currently registered, reflecting active interest and involvement in the program.

Oral Health

During the month of November, the team carried out oral screenings in 16 schools, successfully reaching a total of 1284 students. This proactive effort revealed that 151 students were identified with decay and 37 of those cases were identified as urgent. This data emphasizes the significance of our program in early detection and intervention for oral health issues.

Fluoride Varnish Program

The implementation of the fluoride varnish program has been progressing well, reflecting a positive trajectory in the teams' efforts. Since its initiation, they have successfully visited 28 schools, administering the first application of fluoride varnish to a total of 373 individuals. Notably, the return rate for consent stands at a satisfactory 47 percent, signifying a strong engagement from the community. This encouraging response is indicative of the program's acceptance. The team is pleased with these outcomes, as they underscore the successful integration of the fluoride varnish program into current initiatives, highlighting its importance in promoting oral health within this target population.

4. Substance Use and Injury Prevention

Icelandic Prevention Model – Planet Youth Timmins

Surveys have been conducted and the team and community coalition partners are anxiously awaiting results to inform next steps, expected in the new year.

Harm Reduction and Opioid Response

1. Harm Reduction Program

Opioid Early Warning System

The board of health shall support the implementation of the Ontario Harm Reduction Program Enhancement which includes implementing or supporting the implementation of opioid overdose early warning systems. The PHU chairs this Timmins & Area Drug Strategy (TADS) sub-group and leads public and partner communication, however the communication of such alerts is a shared responsibility of all partners on the TADS Steering committee, as well as broader community partners, including municipalities. The PHU continues to engage with partners to collect timely local data and ensure messages are shared broadly with respect to any trends noted, or alerts required. A yellow alert was issued on November 20, 2023, and demobilized on December 6, 2023.

An example of the email shared with over 200 recipients across the region:

It has come to our attention through the Opioid Surveillance and Early Warning System that there has been a trigger threshold reached: A condensed period of time (single evening/day) where there are multiple suspected opioid incidents. The Porcupine Health Unit is contacting partners to ensure those working with people who use substances are aware of the situation so you can continue to discuss overdose prevention strategies and naloxone availability. We need to highlight prevention and access to naloxone, the life-saving medication to temporarily reverse an opioid overdose, always, and especially during this concerning situation.

Issue(s):

- Increase in suspected opioid overdoses in a condensed period of time.
 - No information on texture.
 - SHST reports more people requiring Naloxone (not just oxygen) and are remaining sedated post-naloxone administration.

Status:

- The current status is **Level 2: Yellow: enhanced surveillance.**
- This alert will automatically demobilize December 6th unless further notice/extension is provided. The poster has this “expiry” date on it. Take the poster down on this date.

What you need to do:

- **Please share this alert widely.**
- Post the attached poster and post/share within your workplace AND with clients.
- Encourage clients to take multiple naloxone kits.
- Ensure you have enough naloxone to support increased distribution (**Naloxone Distribution Sites**).
- Please reinforce these messages and share widely with clients and partners.
- Please share on your social media page: Please share the PHU post (will be released on Facebook today).

Public Health messages provided include:

- Don't use alone.
 - Use at a supervised consumption site **if your community has one.** Safe Health Site Timmins – 21 Cedar St North / **Timmins** – is open 9:00 am to 9:00 pm.

- If people are using together, ensure one person can respond if an opioid overdose happens.
- Use the National Overdose Response Service 1-888-688-NORS (6677).
- Test a small amount first. Go slow.
- Avoid mixing substances.
- The drug supply is unpredictable. ANY drug may contain powerful opioids. People have overdosed and were unaware they were using substances with opioids in them.
- Carry naloxone kits. **Take multiple doses of naloxone with you.**

Free naloxone kits are readily available throughout the area at Porcupine Health Unit offices, naloxone distribution sites, most emergency departments, and at many pharmacies. A list of available sites is available at: [Where to get a free naloxone kit | ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca/en/health/where-to-get-a-free-naloxone-kit).

If any new information presents itself in your agency, please send any updates to OpioidEarlyResponse@porcupinehu.on.ca.

Subscription to the Alert Distribution List:

People can be added to the alert list by emailing harmreduction@porcupinehu.on.ca with the subject line ALERT LIST. People can be removed from the alert list by emailing harmreduction@porcupinehu.on.ca with the subject line REMOVE ALERT LIST.

Sexual Health/Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), including HIV and other Blood Borne Infections (BBI)

Health Promotion Activities

World AIDS Day: (Please see Appendix A – 2023 World AIDS Day Final Report)

Infectious Diseases

1. Control of Infectious Diseases (CID)

Branch Visit - Moosonee

In the last week of November, the Manager of Infectious Disease and Clinical Services travelled to the health unit's most northern branch office in Moosonee. The manager had the opportunity to meet with PHU staff and connect with local community partners in the Moosonee and Moose Factory First Nation communities. During the week, a nurse from Timmins hosted various school immunization catch-up clinics as well as community flu/COVID-19 vaccine clinics. Health Unit staff observed World's Aids Day by placing red scarves, hats, and mittens on the hydro poles lining First Street, which is the main street in the community. The items are free for community members to take to show their support in ending stigma around HIV.

The visit also included travel across Moose River to Moose Factory Island, via helicopter, for a meeting with the health director and staff from the Moose Factory Health Centre regarding the State of Emergency declared by the Moose Cree First Nation Chief and Counsel on November 24, 2023. A state of emergency was declared in response to the on-going substance use crisis in the community. This in-person visit was an opportunity for the health unit to listen and learn from local community health partners on their experiences and concerns for their community's well-being and safety. The health unit continues to offer support and resources to community leadership as they address the current crisis. The day

ended with visit to Weeneebayko General Hospital to network with Weeneebayko Area Health Authority (WAHA) staff about public health programs and services in the North.

Surveillance

As part of surveillance monitoring, a monthly surveillance report is compiled and distributed by the Epidemiologist at the Porcupine Health Unit (PHU). It has been noted that the PHU, along with some other northern health units, has seen an increase in invasive Group A streptococcus (iGAS) cases compared to provincial rates, especially during the month of October. Upon review of iGAS cases in October 2023, a letter was shared with health care providers across the PHU advising them of this increase, with an information sheet. The team has already received thanks for sharing this information and important reminder of this potentially severe and even fatal infection.

Environmental Health

1. Healthy Environments

The Environmental Health team continues to address public health inspection requirements across the region and has been working with several facilities to support those experiencing outbreaks.

Knowledge and Strategic Services

1. Health Equity

The 3 working groups of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity committee continue to meet monthly or bi-weekly. The groups address specific topics for populations of focus:

- French Language Services
- Indigenous Health
- 2SLGBTQ+ Health

Each of these groups are identifying priorities and developing an action plan to ensure the PHU offers quality services that are inclusive and delivered in a safe and welcoming space.

French Language Services Survey

The Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) reaffirms its commitment to delivering equitable and secure healthcare services to its French-speaking clientele. In pursuit of this objective, the PHU released on November 29, 2023, a brief survey designed to capture the service experiences of French-speaking clients. The survey aims to gather valuable data, identify areas for improvement, and formulate meaningful strategies to enhance services for French-speaking clients.

2. Population Health Assessment and Surveillance

The epidemiologist completed 1 epidemiology request for service in November. The epidemiologist continues to provide monthly reports on infectious diseases locally and in comparison, to the province. They are currently creating an Infectious Disease Reports for 2020 to 2022.

3. Communications

Since COVID-19, the Porcupine Health Unit's presence on social media channels has increased and promotes health messages and health unit programs and services. Each channel targets a different population segment: Facebook – adults; Instagram – high school students; and Twitter – workplaces. A total of 86 Facebook posts (French and English), 9 Instagram posts and 2 Tweets were shared on the health unit's social media channels in November.

Two media releases were published in November to promote World AIDS Day that is recognized annually on December 1 as well as the French Language Services Survey. Additionally, the health unit completed 4 media requests.

Respectfully submitted,

Lianne Catton, MD, CCFP-EM, MPH
Medical Officer of Health/Chief Executive Officer