

PORCUPINE HEALTH UNIT

Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board of Health



We Are Public Health - Nous sommes la santé publique
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Prepared by:
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Medical Officer of Health – Chief Executive Officer
April 28, 2022

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

Porcupine Health Unit Status

*This table was updated on **Thursday, April 28, 2022, at 12:00 p.m.***

Total Tests Completed*	157,165
Number of cases**	5,834
2022 Cases	2,690
Active Cases	204
In Hospital	9
Deceased	49

**Of which PHU is aware. Data has a 2-day lag and is extracted from the Ministry of Health VA Tool.*

***Number of confirmed cases, to date, including active, out of region, and resolved.*

****Number of recovered cases plus the number of deceased cases.*

Testing data includes testing from community assessment centres and other health care settings, as well as targeted surveillance initiatives, such as in long-term care homes. Data is current with a 2-day lag.

There are presently 148 active cases in the PHU. Testing and provincial reporting has evolved, and the PHU reporting will reflect these changes as the stages of the pandemic evolves. With changes to testing the numbers have decreased however, the pandemic is not over. COVID-19 is still circulating within the communities of the PHU, outbreaks are still present, and announcements of tragic outcomes are still occurring. Part of the idea of learning to live with COVID is recognition that the risk is still present, the virus is still here, and that everyone has a responsibility and role to play to reduce the risk for those who may be more vulnerable and for those communities that may be more vulnerable to adverse events from COVID-19. The messaging remains the same and continues to be shared with PHU partners.

The Provincial mask order for high-risk settings, such as hospitals, healthcare, and long-term care homes/retirement homes, has been extended until June 11th. The PHU, along with other health units and health care settings across the province are also continuing the mask mandate for staff and includes visitors accessing PHU services.

With increasing BA.2 variant across the province the severity of infections appears to be less however it is even more readily transmissible. Opportunities to reduce the risk for those most vulnerable are important as the PHU has a significant population at risk for adverse events. With back to school and removal of masks an increase has been noted in young kids. Canadian and children's hospitals have noticed an increase in admissions, and we are all monitoring very closely. Public Health strongly recommends masking in public places especially in closed indoor public places where there are lots of people. Continued support of mask friendly environments in all communities and in all settings is very important at this time.

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Testing has expanded across the province. The expansion was to enable individuals who may be eligible for treatment. An online screening tool is available to assist with determining eligibility for treatment and promotion to have health care providers assess patients has been shared by the province, and the PHU.

Case and contact management also continues to evolve. As strains become more transmissible, the capacity to contain the infection has changed. The focus remains protecting vulnerable settings and at-risk populations. The PHU continues to work closely with acute care, long term care, congregate living settings and First Nation communities to support any measures and case and contact management procedures that may be in place. Virtual assist is now in use province wide, and cases will receive a text or email. Data collected will be used to continue the close monitoring and surveillance of infection within the PHU region. Messaging will be issued to the public advising of this new program.

To date there has been 6,939 cases across the PHU region. These numbers are incredible, with consideration of the changes in the testing eligibility over the last four months. In 2022 alone there have been just over 3,700 confirmed cases. The PHU team and IPAC Hub team are managing outbreaks at two long term care homes, one acute care setting and four congregate care settings.

Vaccine Update

Vaccine messaging “Keep up to Date with your COVID Vaccines” has been issued and reflect the evidence that immunity is effective but does wane over time. Recommendations have come forward for fourth doses for those over the age of 60, as well as offering fourth doses to First Nation, Inuit, Métis adults and their household members as well as fifth doses for certain immunocompromised groups. There is expectation that the evidence will continue to be assessed by the National Advisory Council and recommendations will come forward. The PHU continues to share the most up to date guidance.

Clinics continued to be offered in all communities. Social media campaigns are increasing around staying up to date with vaccines. The PHU continues to collaborate with community partners to set up vaccine clinics for guests who have been evacuated from their home community. The PHU team monitors local data as well as vaccine guidance to ensure ongoing opportunities for vaccinations are available reflecting local context and needs across the region.

Novavax has arrived at the PHU region. It is available for those who have contraindications to the mRNA vaccine series or potentially refused mRNA vaccines. The PHU has continued collaboration with EMS to offer vaccine for home-bound patients and continue to work with First Nation communities to co-develop or support vaccine clinics on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.

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ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS

With the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recognizing that the vaccine program will continue to demand PHU staff resources, the PHU continues to focus on recovery and return to public health programs and priorities.

Opioid Response

The PHU team has continued focused work in the response to the Opioid Crisis. Support continues for partners and organizations requesting to become naloxone distribution sites, including Safe Health Site Timmins and First Nation communities. The emergency response task force continues to monitor local data closely to inform partners, those who use substances, and the public concerning trends and tragic events. Yellow alerts were issued from April 7th to the 21st related to an increase in suspected drug related EMS calls in multiple locations over a one-week period compared to the previous six weeks.

In Timmins, the PHU has been working with partners to submit the application for the temporary urgent public health needs site (UPHNS), which will be funded by the City of Timmins and will be operated by the Timmins and District Hospital. A site visit from Health Canada was completed on April 25th. Review of the application for exemption will take approximately a few weeks. The site will provide opportunities to save lives urgently and connect individuals with services.

The PHU and partners continue to move forward with the Consumption Treatment Services application for a permanent site with funding. The application for this permanent funded site has started, and the process is substantial. A partner has stepped forward to be the operator for the permanent site, and steps required for the application are underway. Timmins and Area Drug Strategy (TADS) is in the process of implementing a Northern Ontario School of Medicine research project which is a feasibility study. In May, an online general survey will be issued to the public. Surveys will also be available at PHU offices in French, English and Cree. Collected data from the survey will be used to inform communication and consideration needs. Newly released data from the Office of the Chief Coroner shows that the PHU region does remain disproportionately impacted by the opioid crisis compared to the rest of the province. While the data is preliminary, last year the PHU was second in the province, this year the PHU is fourth. PHU is still double the provincial rate, with 40-50 cases/100,000 while provincially the rate is <20 cases/100,000. Any loss is too many. The work must continue in all pillars to address these alarming trends and prevent further tragic losses. The PHU remains committed to the tremendous work to address this crisis.

Environmental Health

The Environmental team will be at 100% completion rate for the high-risk food premise inspections by the end of April. The team has achieved 100% compliance for recreational water inspections by the end of the first quarter in March 2022. The team has also addressed much of the work with the Infection/CCM team around outbreak investigations and management. Over the months of March and April the Environmental team assisted with the management of 9 outbreaks within the PHU region.

The team continues to work with local, federal and community partners to support the recent evacuation of Kashechewan First Nation community members. The team continues to support the ongoing response to the recent blastomycosis outbreak as well.

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Healthy Babies, Healthy Children

Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program (HBHC) continues to support families and young ones. The team is prioritizing the HBHC services in the branch offices. There is currently a wait list of 20 families. In-person visits have resumed, and the obstetrical services liaison program will resume in May to complete the healthy baby healthy children screen. It is expected the numbers of consents and referrals to increase as well as breastfeeding education. In Healthy Growth and Development programs, virtual prenatal sessions are being offered in May in collaboration with the Timmins Native Friendship Centre.

Healthy Growth and Development

The Healthy Growth and Development Program has provided virtual sessions allowing the PHU to increase its reach and support the delivery of pre-natal education in French. Virtual sessions decrease barriers related to childcare and transportation. An increase in participation of families with difficult life circumstances and an increase in referrals to the Canadian pre-natal nutrition program have been noted. The District of Cochrane Early Years committee is resuming. This committee is comprised of several community partners across the PHU. Its mission is to strategically plan for the effective delivery of programs and services to build stronger healthier children, youth, and families in the distinctive communities of Cochrane through a collaborative approach. The breast-feeding support continues both virtually and with home visits.

Information Technology

Information Technology Department continues to work with both BerceL and Watsec to enhance the security of PHU IT systems. Watsec has completed its first test of phishing e-mails. A pre-assessment test was conducted to assess the ability to recognize and respond to suspicious emails. A report has been received and review is underway. A new I.T. security education plan will begin on May 2nd. Topics for this quarter include:

- Good Password Practice
- Multifactor Authentication
- The Benefits of Password Managers
- Data Protection: Data Destruction

Foundational Standards

The PHU is pleased to be receiving an award of recognition from the Réseau du mieux-être francophone du Nord de l'Ontario for the health unit's contribution and efforts to improve access to and equity of health services in French. During the pandemic, the health unit ensured that all communication to the public was available in both French and English. A French Facebook page was launched in the fall of 2020 to facilitate sharing of COVID-19 information.

Indigenous Cultural Competency Education for new staff or staff who were not able to complete the training prior to COVID-19 pandemic is planned for 2022-2023, beginning next month. An invitation will be extended to any new Board members who may wish to attend as well.

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Vaccine Preventable Disease

High School vaccine catch-up clinics were completed in February. The PHU continues to catch up grade 7/8 students in office clinics in response to students who missed vaccines when the school vaccination program was on hold due to the pandemic. The PHU mailed overdue notification to parents of elementary schools' students, and Hepatitis B and HPV overdue notifications will be sent for Grade 7,8, 9 and 10 students in preparation for upcoming May clinics.

The PHU has discontinued the travel clinics and TB clinics for non-case contact management. In 2018 the Ontario Public Health Standards were amended which removed travel clinics as the required work of public health. The PHU does not have the capacity to continue due to the required services the PHU must deliver and is accountable for under the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), the required ongoing COVID response, as well as the backlog of public health work. Communications to Health Care Providers will be issued. Yellow fever immunization will continue to be offered. The PHU will continue to offer Tuberculosis testing related to outbreaks, exposure, or case and contact management. Tuberculosis testing for employment or placement purposes will no longer be a service provided.

Human Resources

Porcupine Health Unit Staffing Changes Update April 27, 2022

The PHU continues to use COVID Response members that have been working for Case and Contact Management or vaccine program to support other programs.
The following permanent positions were recently filled:

Permanent positions

- Public Health Nurse – Kapuskasing
- Public Health Inspector – Timmins
- Speech-Language Assistant

Resignations:

- Public Health Inspector, Kapuskasing
- Administrative Assistant, Hearst
- Harm Reduction Outreach Worker (part-time), Timmins
- Health Promoter, IPAC Hub, Timmins

Retirement:

Manager of Oral Health, Vision, Speech-Language, Administrative staff – August 31, 2022

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Human Resources(cont'd)

Note:

- Temporary and Casual positions in COVID related programs and services are currently under review for extensions to September 2 and for some positions to December 31, 2022.

Other Items:

April 4th to 8th was the first Canadian Public Health Week, a great opportunity to recognize the tremendous work and strength of public health in responding to the pandemic for the past two years.

Letters from Chair Perras, on behalf of the Board and Dr. Catton were sent to all Porcupine Health Unit Staff recognizing the staff's significant contribution to the health and well being of PHU's communities.

The 2019 Annual Report has been issued. The report was delayed due to the pandemic. The report acknowledges the 75th anniversary of the PHU and recognizes the great work the PHU has accomplished across the region, over seven decades of excellence and local connections to create healthy communities.

Respectfully Submitted,
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Medical Officer of Health/Chief Executive Officer
Porcupine Health Unit