

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
January 26, 2023

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) Status

*This table was updated on **Wednesday, January 25, 2023, at 12:00 p.m.***

Total Tests Completed*	180,433
Number of cases**	9,088
2022 Cases	5,460
Active Outbreaks	3
In Hospital	5
Deceased	87

**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.

To date the PHU has 9,088 cases of COVID and with 3 active outbreaks across the region including Long-term Care Homes/Retirement Home (LTCH/RH) and acute care hospitals, which includes one enteric virus and one coronavirus. We continue to see some Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and Influenza cases. The province is closely following another variant of COVID. The XBB.1.5 variant is expected to be more transmissible, and another surge may be expected. In an effort to minimize hospitalization rates, poor outcomes and preserve our limited and fragile healthcare capacity across the region, the PHU continues to provide opportunities for both COVID and Influenza immunizations. Influenza was seen early in the region. Provincially influenza, COVID and RSV are reported to be stabilizing but historically the North tends to peak a couple weeks behind the remainder of the province. It appears to be somewhat stable here as well and monitoring continues.

Vaccine Update:

Regionally, the PHU continues to provide opportunities to access vaccine. The PHU has now received the Bivalent Pfizer and Moderna boosters for anyone over the age of 12. The vaccine rates have been 88% for first doses over the age of five. Third dose uptake remains low at 55% for over the age of 12 across the region. Uptake of fall boosters is important to prevent infection and hospitalization. Staying up to date with your vaccine remains the key message the PHU is reinforcing. The ongoing COVID immunization guidance and program has yet to be determined but is expected that the COVID immunization program will continue and align with the immunization program.

ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS

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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 look to recovery, planning and the return to public health programs and priorities.

Immunization:

The PHU continues the catch up for students in office to support those who missed vaccines when the school vaccination program was on hold due to the pandemic. Regionally a Saturday clinic was held for students in grades 8-12. In collaboration with schools, the PHU mailed overdue notifications to school students to offer opportunities for routine and over-due vaccination. Where primary care is limited, the PHU continues to provide routine immunization for infants and children. Influenza and COVID clinics continue to be offered a few days a week in Timmins and weekly in all communities across the region. The PHU team remains incredibly busy. Since October, 467 client visits occurred throughout district for routine immunization with 796 routine vaccines administered. Uptake for Influenza vaccine has been greater this year with 4,917 vaccines administered. Recognition that in previous years on average 3000 Influenza vaccines were administered.

Environmental Health:

Throughout COVID-19 the PHU team continued to work with six other northern health units on the collaborative Climate Change Project. The project, funded by Health Canada, looks at what climate change means for the region, it's impact and strategies to address it. An increase in floods, forest fires, blue green algae, blastomycosis, and the presence of Lyme disease are regional impacts of climate change. The Environmental team completed 99% of high-risk food premise inspections and has achieved 100% compliance for recreational water inspections for 2022. The team continues to address much of the work outbreak investigations and management. In 2022, 92 outbreaks were declared and managed. In 2022 the Environmental Health team completed 173 rabies investigations.

Foundational Standards:

Opportunities for staff development are an important component of recovery. PHU staff who work with community partners attended community engagement training provided by the Tamarack Institute. The training addressed engagement practices with communities to generate solutions around community issues, and ways to build capacity and expertise with committees, coalitions and emergency response tables.. Staff also attended training with Public Health Ontario, to increase skills in the planning and delivery of public health interventions which will increase effectiveness of programs and services. In 2022, 23 PHU staff completed the Indigenous Cultural Safety Training. The Board of Health is encouraged to attend the Indigenous Cultural Safety Training in 2023.

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Surveillance:

The PHU continues to closely monitor COVID as well as other infectious diseases and continues to provide monthly interactive infectious disease reports. Alerts have been received from other northern health unit areas with respect to Syphilis. The PHU region has not seen these trends but continue to monitor it closely. An education session is planned for health care providers across the region around surveillance monitoring, testing and treatment. The PHU's epidemiologist completed analysis and interpretation of the survey conducted for the permanent consumption services site application. The epidemiologist continues to provide the weekly COVID-19 report to inform management and partners.

Annual Service Plan:

Work has begun on the Annual Service Plan. The Annual Service Plan is the PHU's budget document that is submitted to the Ministry outlining the program indicators, plans, objectives, and goals including the local context, priorities and needs, as well as the budget for 2023.

Annual Reports:

The 2021 PHU Population Health Status report has been updated and will be shared with municipalities.

Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program:

The Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program has been very successful, and it is anticipated its success will continue. The Dental department is in the process of renewing service agreements with dentists/denturists who previously participated in the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program. Over the last two weeks, sixty one percent (61%) of providers have already entered into a service agreement with the PHU to offer treatment to seniors. In 2022 the demand exceeded the funding. A request for one-time funding was made to cover the deficit.

Harm Reduction:

The Harm Reduction program does not only provide needles and safe use supplies but offers opportunities for connections to other health care service resources, social service resources as well as potentially STI testing or information around other outbreaks in the area.

Harm reduction client visits in the Timmins PHU office peaked in June with 481 visits and in December, 191 visits were noted. The number of client visits is not unique to Timmins, but an increase in visits has been noted across all branches. The PHU Harm Reduction services also include offering connections to other services and supports.

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Staff Conference:

In 2021 the PHU winter conference was cancelled due to the pandemic. Recognition of the challenges that the PHU team has faced in its response to the pandemic, and as part of the PHU's ongoing training and recovery, an all staff winter conference was held in December 2022. Staff engaged in important discussions around the topic of inclusivity with keynote speakers from Pride Fierté Timmins. It was extremely well received by all. The conference offered staff education, engagement, and team building. Plans are underway for a spring staff conference to allow further opportunity for engagement and capacity building. Grand Rounds have returned monthly with opportunities for staff education, connection and to receive public health updates, education, policy development and highlights from branch offices.

Human Resources:

Like all organizations, recruitment and retention remains challenging, especially with temporary positions due to temporary funding, and positions requiring a specific skill set. Ongoing recruitment to fill vacancies as required continues.

Information Technology:

As previously outlined and shared in the PHU's Risk Assessment, Information Technology (I.T.) was identified as a high risk. Significant assessments and achievements have occurred with the assistance of two outside agencies. A vulnerability assessment was conducted by Watsec, and a multifactor authentication implementation is planned for early 2023. The I.T. system is supported by Bercell. Bercell regularly identifies and implements updates to the PHU systems to enhance security of systems. Front Desk, a new online booking system was recently launched at the PHU. The booking system will offer the public self scheduling of vaccination and clinical services offered at the PHU. Having our own booking system offered great advantages during the complex COVID-19 vaccine program. The PHU servers are nearing end of life and warranty. Procurement of new servers will be required in 2023. A new staff member, bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge, has recently joined the I.T. team.

Respectfully Submitted,
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Porcupine Health Unit