

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
March 10, 2022

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

Porcupine Health Unit Status

*This table was updated on **Thursday, March 10, 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.

Numerous provincial announcements were made yesterday. Ontario will remove the mandatory masking requirement for most settings on March 21st. The province is improving, but it is important to be mindful and cognizant that the PHU Region is in a different state than the rest of the province. The North is seeing different trends and the challenges and inequities that are faced are incredibly significant. All PHU communities share a responsibility to maintain diligence as impacts of cases in one area will be felt across all communities in the region. There are numerous individuals across the region that are vulnerable to adverse events from COVID and at greater risk for poor outcomes. Recognition is required that Omicron is very much still here, can cause outbreaks in communities and tragic outcomes.

The Provincial changes advise that mask use will not be required in most public settings. All MOHs and CMOH are still strongly recommending mask use in public spaces. Masking will be an individual decision, and for as many who are ready, there must be recognition of those who are nervous entering into this next stage and do not feel comfortable going out in public without masks. There will be individuals who are immunocompromised, have loved ones who are at greater risk and those who choose to wear masks for their own comfort level and protection. It is important that all communities and leadership share a voice of support, respect, and kindness to those who choose to wear masks. It is also important to note the PHU still has many cases and masks are an important layer of protection.

Mask use will still be required in hospitals, long term care homes (LTCH), retirement homes (RH), congregate care settings, and public transit. Organizations can continue with mask mandates similar to vaccine policies which the PHU continues to support. Beginning March 14th, weekly changes to Provincial directives on continued mask use with recommendations and operating guidance will be issued for Hospitals, health care, congregate living and LTCH/RH providing direction to these organizations.

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The PHU has shifted case reporting to include more regularly the percent positivity and hospitalization admission rates as the case numbers do not reflect the numbers of those infected. There is a much smaller subset of the population that is eligible for testing through the provincial lab system. Reporting is only those tests done through the provincial lab system and does not include personal rapid antigen testing. There are many more people with COVID than the numbers currently reported by PHU and the Province.

The PHU has had 5,834 cases across the region which is vastly underrated. In 2022 alone, there has been 2,690 confirmed cases. Currently there are 204 active cases. The PHU is managing outbreaks at one LTCH, two acute care settings and one congregate living setting. The PHU's percent positivity is quite high at 21%. Within the last week the PHU has witnessed a slight decline, but it is too early to tell if this trend will remain. The PHU remains cautious as dips previously noted with Omicron have been followed by spikes resulting in record highs.

Vaccine Update

The PHU team continues to work incredibly hard to provide opportunities of vaccination. Vaccine rates 5+ are at 88.2% for first doses and the rate for second dose is 82.4%. The third dose rate is 53.3% and the PHU continues to promote third doses as we evidenced with Omicron, three doses are required to prevent an infection.

The PHU team is still responding to the pandemic with a significant amount to time and resources. The PHU is anxious to move to recovery but recognizes that the province will be facing COVID for a long time. Plans are in place to allow for surges, and outbreak response. Staffing review is ongoing to ensure the PHU has the capacity to return to address the significant public health backlog but also to be prepared to respond to COVID as required.

ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS

While the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and now the vaccine program continues to demand increasing PHU staff resources, the PHU team continues to respond to other urgent and emergent public health protection issues and work continues in other public health programs.

Opioid Response

The Opioid Crisis has required another concurrent emergency response across the Porcupine region. There have been significant tragic losses throughout the last few years. The PHU continues to work with community partners to provide access to Naloxone. The Matheson, Iroquois Falls, Cochrane emergency departments are now officially onboarded as Naloxone distribution sites. This partnership is critical, to expand access to members of the communities of Matheson, Iroquois Falls and Cochrane to this life saving measure.

The Opioid Emergency Response Task Force continues to monitor calls to EMS, OPP, TPS, NAPS and emergency visits across the region for suspected opioid overdoses. When the rates reach a certain threshold, alerts are issued and communicated across the region. At this time there are no current alerts issued.

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The PHU chairs monthly Timmins Area and Drug Strategy (TADS) meetings. Prior to COVID, strategic planning had been underway. The focus will see a return to developing the community drug strategy and looking at the consumption treatment site, providing support to save lives urgently. A return to developing the comprehensive drug strategy is important because it is looking at the broader needs to address substance use; and reduce the number of individuals that end up with mental health concerns. This includes for example upstream initiatives addressing inequities, policy, housing, safe active communities, and supports for young families such as the healthy babies healthy children program.

The PHU also chairs the committee and works with key partners such as Timmins & District Hospital (TADH) and City of Timmins (COT) who are instrumental in the development of the Urgent Public Health Needs Site. The application for the Urgent Public Health Needs Site in Timmins was submitted in 2021. TADH has taken lead as the operator and the COT has provided funding for the site as well as a community coordinator. Community engagement has been ongoing, with presentations conducted with TADH, TPS and COT, to the Timmins BIA as well as the Timmins Chamber. Health Canada is planning a required site visit within the next month as part of the application process. The site will be staffed by medical professionals to provide support and respond if required. The site will also be an important connector to other programs and services such as social and medical services. An application process is also underway for the Consumption Treatment Services Site. An anti-stigma group developed and implemented a survey at the end of 2021 distributed to employees of downtown business and agencies. The data has been compiled and a presentation will be made to the steering committee. The PHU is appreciative of the collaboration and immense contribution of community partners moving this critical work forward. The PHU continues to provide support to communities with discussions about substance use prevention strategies.

The PHU continues to expand critical outreach work, with support from the Ministry of Health AIDS Bureau and Hepatitis C Programs. The PHU received an increase in base funding as well as some one-time funding. A program co-ordinator for the harm reduction outreach program was hired. The PHU has also been able to purchase a vehicle (Appendix A) to support expansion of outreach services across the PHU, as well as added opportunities for outreach services within Timmins.

Environmental Health

Despite the tremendous work in addressing outbreak management, the PHU continues to move forward addressing the essential inspections as required. Currently, the Environmental Health team has completed 42% of the high-risk premise inspections with a deadline of April 29th for completion. In addition, the team has completed 74% of the recreational water inspections with a deadline of March 31st for completion.

Since January 01, 2022, the Environmental Health team has participated in the management of the following outbreaks:

- 20 COVID-19 related outbreaks,
- Two non-COVID-19 related outbreaks, and
- Two enteric outbreaks.

These outbreaks have occurred in various high-risk settings, such as long-term care, retirement homes, congregate care homes and correctional facilities. The team works to support the outbreak and investigation with the case and contact management team and works in collaboration with the infectious disease team to support the infection

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prevention and outbreak control HUB for the region. They have provided education and information sessions. They have attended sites to expand and enhance practices and knowledge in infection control. The Environmental Health team continues to work in collaboration addressing the blastomycosis outbreak in a First Nation community.

The PHU continues to work collaboratively with municipalities around climate change. This project was funded by Health Canada and engages with municipalities to look at climate change effects and possible mitigation strategies. Discussions are early stages, but work has begun, and is anticipated to increase as an important area of focus in recovery.

Human Resources

Porcupine Health Unit Staffing Changes Update March 9,2022

The PHU continues to hire team members across the region.

Permanent positions

- Program Manager – Health and Well-Being/Branch Nurses
- Program Coordinator – Harm Reduction Outreach
- 2 Public Health Nurse positions in Timmins

Resignations

- Public Health Nurse, Timmins – March 9, 2022
- 1 - Covid Response Assistants, Kapuskasing, Casual
- Administrative Assistant, Timmins

Current Vacancies:

- 1 Permanent Public Health Inspector
- 1 Temporary Public Health Inspector
- 1 Permanent Public Health Nurses, Kapuskasing (interviews in process)
- 1 Permanent Public Health Nurse, Timmins (interviews in process)
- 1 Harm Reduction Outreach Worker, Timmins (posted)

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.

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Annual Service Plan

The PHU has submitted the Annual Service Plan and Budget to the Ministry. The submission includes request for an increased operational dental budget of \$225,000. The program has been very successful. Other one time funding requests were submitted and includes support for vaccine fridges; the needle exchange program; consultation for the capital project; Indigenous Liaison; opioid response; public health recovery to address the significant public health backlog as a result of the pandemic; as well as COVID response and the vaccine program.

Respectfully Submitted,
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Porcupine Health Unit