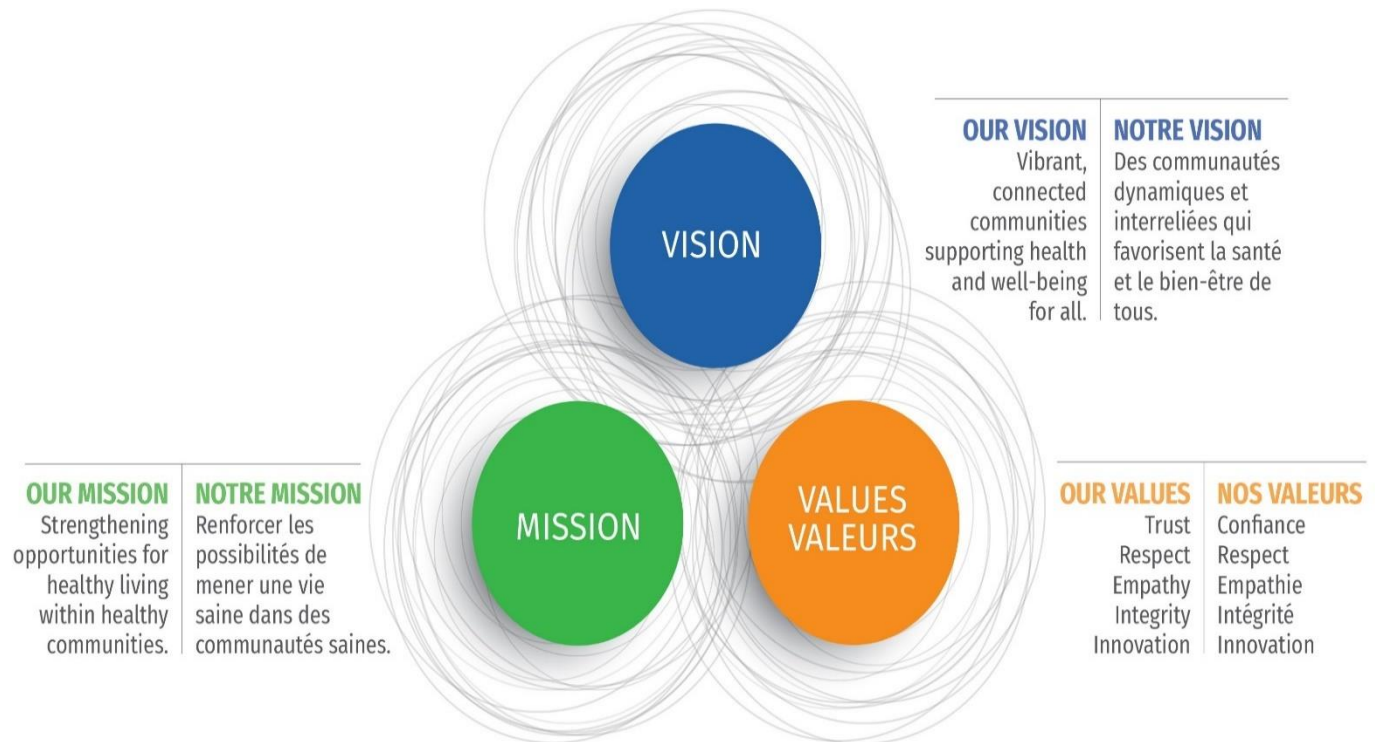


PORCUPINE HEALTH UNIT

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 2, 2023

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

Porcupine Health Unit (PHU) Status

*This table was updated on **Wednesday, March 1, 2023, at 12:00 p.m.***

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| Total Tests Completed* | 181,501 |
| Number of cases** | 9,180 |
| 2023 Cases | 253 |
| Active Outbreaks | 1 |
| In Hospital | 1 |
| Deceased | 88 |

**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.

Currently there is 1 active COVID-19 outbreak in the PHU region. There continues to be Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and Influenza cases. To minimize hospitalization rates, poor outcomes and preserve limited and fragile healthcare capacity across the region, the PHU continues to provide opportunities for both COVID-19 and Influenza immunizations. Influenza was seen early in the region, whereas usually the increase is seen late in the season. Provincially influenza, COVID-19 and RSV are reported to be stabilizing. Regionally, it appears to be somewhat stable here as well with close monitoring continuing.

COVID-19 Vaccine Update

The PHU continues to provide opportunities to access vaccine and remains the main channel for COVID-19 immunization in the region. The vaccine rates are 88% for first doses over the age of five. Third dose uptake remains low at 52.5% for over the age of 12 across the region. Uptake of bivalent doses is important to prevent infection and hospitalization. Staying up to date with your vaccine remains the key message the PHU is reinforcing as well as continued promotion of hand washing, cough etiquette, masking and staying home when unwell. The ongoing COVID-19 immunization guidance and program in terms of recommended intervals has yet to be determined however, it is clear the COVID-19 immunization program will continue.

The PHU continues to plan for the Spring COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign. Numerous Ministry vaccine templates have been completed and submitted. While details are pending, it is expected that the Spring campaign will target high risk populations such as residents in long term care homes, retirement homes, ALC patients in hospitals, and those over the age of 65 (for a second COVID-19 Bivalent vaccine). Public health is expecting and planning for a Fall COVID-19 vaccine program, in line with the Influenza vaccine program. The Spring campaign plans to leverage community partners to support vaccination of high-risk populations. In the PHU region, despite support from pharmacies and primary care, the vast majority of vaccination is provided by the PHU. This is an incredible undertaking with such a small team. The PHU continues to offer COVID-19 and influenza clinics in every community.

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The PHU contacted every parent and guardian of children under the age of 5 who had only received their first dose of COVID-19 to offer an appointment for a second dose. There was expected to be a delay in the shipment of Moderna, and parents were advised and offered an opportunity to be vaccinated with the supply on hand.

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

Current Alerts

The PHU region has received several extreme cold warning alerts. The PHU system is related to Environment Canada. The Porcupine Health Unit shares announcements issued by municipalities. The offices of the Porcupine Health Unit place notifications on its office doors advising of warming centres and available supports and services. PHU amplifies messages of emergency shelter availability, the risks and impacts of the cold, as well as increased outreach services in Timmins, often offering mitts, socks, hot chocolate.

Opioid alerts continue to be shared, with a significant red alert currently active and amplified, with further details shared below.

Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program

The Ontario Senior's Dental Care Program continues to be successful. Sixty-three claims were processed during the month of January. Four denturists and twenty-five dentists have entered into a partnership agreement with the Porcupine Health Unit. It is expected that the program will continue to see an increase in the demand for services, and the budget will need to increase to support this important and much needed service.

Food Safety

Compliance inspections are underway across all risk rating premises. The PHU has hosted seven *Food Handler Certification* courses this year. This course is required by food service premises every five years. Ten further food handler certification courses are scheduled by the end of June. Significant uptake in this program has been noted which works to reduce food borne illness and outbreaks.

Healthy Environments

The PHU continues as a result of the collaboration with the other six northern health units on the climate change project. The team is now partnering with Temiskaming Health Unit, looking at next steps in terms of impact assessment for the region from climate change. The PHU has witnessed impacts of climate change with frequent heat and cold alerts, fire and flood related evacuations as well as new vector borne illness such as Lyme disease and blue green algae.

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Healthy Growth and Development

The Healthy Growth and Development program in partnership with EarlyON is offering a second session of perinatal mental health promotion, with excellent enrollment. Supporting and promoting mental health and well-being, supporting families in the perinatal stage is critical to the health and wellbeing of the PHU population. The PHU tends to see a greater rate of higher risk assessments done with new parents in the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program. There is work building partnerships with Moosonee, offering *Nurturing the Seed* program. With the loss of nursing staff in Moosonee, the Healthy Growth and Development Coordinator has travelled to support public health needs, to begin this work, with ongoing community partner meetings. Community partner meetings are ongoing. The PHU is currently offering first English session of virtual prenatal classes of 2023.

Healthy Babies Healthy Children

There is currently no waitlist for this important program. At this time, with some family home visitor (FHV) staffing constraints, visiting for all families is being maintained by both professional (public health nurse (PHN) only) and blended (FHV and PHN) home visiting and all visits are conducted in-person. The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program has not received an increase in funding since 2008.

Immunization Program

Opportunities for vaccine catch up continues to be offered at all PHU offices. As per the *Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA)*, the PHU contacts parents of students who are due for vaccination, providing information around the vaccines, addressing questions, and offering to book them in a health unit office.

The PHU placed significant efforts providing options to students who missed their vaccines during the pandemic. Current catch-up rates of students up to Grade 12 for Hepatitis B is 80.3%, Human Papilloma Virus 69.6% and Meningococcal is 97.9%. With recent tragic deaths related to Meningitis noted in Eastern Canada and Ontario, the importance of vaccination against these infectious diseases is critical. Similarly, outbreaks of Pertussis and Diphtheria have been reported. During the month of February, the PHU offered a vaccine clinic in all high schools for Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis). Provincially and beyond, cases of Polio and Measles have been reported and these alerts have been shared with primary care and EMS across the region.

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Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control

The PHU continues to work with partners supporting the investigation and management an outbreak of Tuberculosis. The PHU will be offering a virtual Tuberculosis Health Care Provider Education Session with a Tuberculosis Specialist from Toronto's West Park Hospital. This session will provide a great opportunity for Health Care Providers to hear from this foremost expert.

On February 1st a virtual presentation on Syphilis was hosted by the PHU with 41 Health Care providers across the region attending. This was an excellent and well attended opportunity to share trends, public health guidance and best practices. Across the North, there has been an increase overall in congenital syphilis and syphilis. While the PHU has not seen this trend, it is hopeful that this shared awareness will contribute to prevention and early recognition by providers as monitoring continues.

School Health

Northern fruit and Vegetable Program

The PHU continues to offer the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Program (NFVP). This program resumed January 9th with 62 elementary and First Nations schools in the PHU participating. Eighty-five interactions were completed to advise and organize the program. Each week the schools receive a delivery of a vegetable and fruit.

The PHU initiated the offer to all schools participating in the NFVP, vermicomposters and uptake of the vermicomposters has been well received.

School Public Health Nurses

The PHU school health nurses continue to support the schools with respect to concerns around COVID-19 and other infectious diseases as well as to support services and resources around concerns other identified topics such as vaping, smoking, physical activity, sexual health resources as well as the school-based immunization clinics. As part of the regular meeting with Directors of Education (DOE), on January 18th the PHU and THU teams presented and discussed an exciting evidence-based initiative, the Icelandic Prevention Model.

School Dental Program

Dental screening is underway. In the month of January, 368 children were screened. Of the 368 children screened, 57 (15.5%) children had dental decay. All parents/guardians of the students in need of oral health services were notified of the concerns and recommendations within two business days of completing screening.

The Fluoride Varnish Program

In the month of January, 33 childcare centres were visited. During these visits, 360 children (0-4 years of age) received one of the three fluoride applications.

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Substance Use and Injury Prevention

Harm Reduction

At the end of 2022, the PHU onboarded three new naloxone distribution sites (Wabun Tribal Council, Ontario Addiction Treatment Centres (OATC) Hearst and Ontario Addiction Treatment Centres (OATC) Constance Lake First Nations). PHU is currently working with three community partners to become naloxone distribution sites in the communities of Matheson and Timmins. Currently in the PHU area, there are thirty-three external sites, in addition to each PHU office.

Opioid Overdose Early Warning System

The Opioid Overdose Early Warning System signaled a red alert yesterday as a result of increased calls and reports from EMS, Hospitals, Safe Health Site Timmins, and others in terms of potential or probable opioid overdoses and events. The alert was immediately shared broadly across the region and all of the Naloxone distribution sites have been advised to issue multiple Naloxone kits in response to the trends seen. The media release was issued today in both French and English. Trends, concerns, messages for partners to also share to increase awareness of overdose prevention, recognizing and responding to an overdose, and any relevant information from the alert itself that may save lives are sent broadly across the region. The ongoing emergency response to this crisis continues to require significant time and resources by the PHU and other community partners.

Supervised Consumption Site Update

Timmins has the Urgent Public Health Needs Site (UPHNS), currently operated by Timmins & District Hospital. There have been over 10,000 client visits at Safe Health Site Timmins. The application for a Consumption Treatment Services Site was submitted on January 27th for federal approval for exemption and provincial funding. CMHA will be the operator of the site.

Mobile Outreach Update

In March 2022, the PHU was able to secure a dedicated vehicle through additional funding received by the AIDS Bureau and Hepatitis C Funding Programs. Having the vehicle has allowed the PHU to expand and increase client reach. In the past, outreach on-foot during cold weather only allowed staff to cover a small area. However, with the addition of a dedicated outreach vehicle has enabled expansion of outreach and the types of services offered on the street.

Cold alerts trigger increased outreach hours. In January, Timmins has had six cold weather alerts. During these times, the PHU provided the following practical supports during outreach, hot chocolate, mitts, socks, support with accessing temporary shelter, and communication about warming stations.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

Substance Use Prevention

The PHU hosted a community presentation event with Planet Youth with respect to the Icelandic Prevention Model. Having a comprehensive approach to substance use, looking upstream to prevent and address the root causes contributing to substance use is critical. This program is an exciting, evidence-based opportunity that has been implemented in other areas of Ontario, Canada, and around the world to address alcohol use in youth. Iceland had over 60% alcohol abuse rate in their youth, with over 65% of youth reported being intoxicated in the last thirty days when they started this program over 20 years ago. After the program's implementation the rate plummeted down to 5%. The PHU met with partners to discuss how to implement this model in the PHU to further focus the upstream prevention work needed to improve the health and wellbeing of youth across the region. This upstream approach in turn, and with time, can decrease the need for safe health sites, mental health and addictions services, and emergency support services. The PHU, along with Temiskaming Health Unit, North Bay District Health Unit funded the in-person engagement session and presentation from Planet Youth. Fifty key partners from across the PHU region were in attendance. Next steps will include planning for a pilot program, in Timmins, in collaboration with partners with a plan to explore the potential to scale the program across the PHU region.

Foundational Standards

Staff education

The PHU continues to provide staff educational opportunities and training for program planning and evaluation, especially with the planning underway to complete the Annual Service Plan submission to the Ministry.

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Epidemiology

The epidemiology reports continue with monthly interactive infectious disease reports. The mental health survey was completed by community members in 2020 and 2022. Analysis of the data is underway, and a summary report will be made available. The report will be helpful in terms of providing local information to community partners on mental health concerns across the region.

Information Technology

The PHU continues to be supported by Bercell. The PHU continues to identify and implement all the regular updates to enhance security of systems and the PHU system is monitored seven days a week.

Community Engagement

The PHU sits on the City of Timmins Safety and Well-Being Plan Leadership table, Cochrane Command Table and attends emergency control group meetings across the region as requested as well as any provincial emergency planning or response calls.

Other

Concerns and risks of the safety of highways within the PHU region was discussed at a regional event with leadership across the region during a visit in the Fall with Bernard Derible, Commissioner of Emergency Management Ontario. The PHU team is currently working on a briefing note and a resolution around the universal risk from a public health perspective.

Dr. Catton will be the Northern Representative on the Council of Medical Officers of Health Executive and will then as well serve as a Board Member of alPHA.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lianne Catton, M.D., CCFP-EM, MPH
Medical Officer of Health/Chief Executive Officer
Porcupine Health Unit