

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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October 27, 2022

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

Porcupine Health Unit Status

*This table was updated on **Wednesday, October 26, 2022, at 12:00 p.m.***

Total Tests Completed*	176,228
Number of cases**	8,610
2022 Cases	5,460
Active Outbreaks	7
In Hospital	11
Deceased	82

**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 8,610 cases of COVID and with 7 active outbreaks across the region including LTCH/RH and acute care hospitals. The PHU continues to support these institutions in outbreak to reduce cases and prevent poor outcomes. Regionally there are hospital admissions due to COVID and admissions provincially are increasing. There have been 65 outbreaks declared in 2022 alone with recognition that the settings where outbreaks are declared decreased in January 2022. Tragically there have been eighty two deaths in the PHU region related to COVID. The percent positivity within the PHU has increased to 20% this week. In comparison, when the PHU was in lockdown the case rate was 20-40 cases per 100,000. Despite reduced testing eligibility, the PHU rates are higher and the PHU's current case rate has increased to 80 per 100,000. The PHU is hearing from local hospitals and hospitals across the province concerns around capacity. Pressure on the acute care system is mounting quickly and steadily. This pressure is not solely related to COVID but other respiratory infections such as RSV, and Influenza. The PHU recently issued a media release advising of its first confirmed case of Influenza. This is incredibly early for the PHU as normally reports of influenza are received during late December to Spring. Thunder Bay is also experiencing significant numbers of influenza and outbreaks. Safe and effective Influenza, and Bi-valent COVID-19 vaccines are being offered across the PHU region. Vaccine has been sent to Primary Care and pharmacies and they are also offering opportunities to access vaccines. Vaccination offers an important opportunity to prevent infection, hospitalization, and ICU admissions, all of which are increasing across the province. The Hospital for Sick Children recently announced their wait times are increasing and are encouraging people to use virtual visits to the emergency department. This is concerning to the North due to smaller capacities, and dependency on larger central centers, especially children's hospitals. Historically the PHU region influenza peak is later. Vaccines are an important opportunity to prevent and curb this, as is masking. In an effort to save health care capacity, there are strong recommendations to return to masking indoors as well as coughing into your sleeve, handwashing and staying home when unwell. The PHU will hold their first influenza vaccines beginning tomorrow and opportunities to obtain COVID vaccine simultaneously for those over the age of 5 will be offered.

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Vaccine Update:

The PHU continues to provide opportunities to access vaccine across the PHU region. The PHU has now received the bi-valent Pfizer vaccine for boosters to anyone over the age of twelve. Vaccine rates are 88% for first doses over the age of five. Third dose uptake remains low at only 55% for those over the age of 12. Uptake needs to increase to prevent infection and hospitalization. The PHU continues to reinforce staying up to date with your vaccine.

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.

Environmental Health:

While responding to communicable diseases, food borne illnesses, and COVID outbreaks, the environmental health team has completed 100 % of the high-risk food premise compliance inspections for the second term for the time period between May and August. In the third term the team also completed 100% recreational water compliance inspections for the time between July and September.

Healthy Babies Healthy Children:

The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program continues to support young Moms and families. The program has thirty-three families enrolled in the Home Visiting Program across seven branches. There are zero families on the wait list, and this continues to be a priority for the team to provide support to families in a timely fashion. All visits have returned to in person as during the pandemic visits were conducted virtually. The Healthy Babies Healthy Children nurses completed their NCAST Parent Child Interaction Scale Certifications. Certification is required for Healthy Babies Health Children home visiting nurses to meet the provincial standard when conducting in home assessments.

Healthy Growth and Development:

Four sessions of virtual prenatal classes are running and are open to all offices of the PHU. The classes have been well attended and well received with seventeen families in attendance. The PHU, in collaboration with the Early ON centres, are offering a perinatal support group. The eight sessions will be held virtually for the introductory series. The sessions provide support in addressing post-partum depression. The Collective Kitchen Workshops are running virtually in partnership with the Anti-Hunger Coalition as part of the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program. The three session workshop targets women of childbearing age, women who are pregnant, and families with young children, providing tools and ingredients to make budget friendly nutritious recipes. Nurturing The Seed is a collaborative partnership with other providers and organizations in Moosonee. It is a strength-based health intervention model designed for indigenous children from birth to age 5 that focuses on the

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promotion of early mental health and well being. The orientation is completed by a PHU program nurse and coordinator in Moosonee. Next steps will entail training for providers and further discussion as to how the PHU team can support the program's implementation in the community.

Foundations:

An Indigenous Engagement Specialist began on October 17th. This position will focus on establishing an internal PHU engagement strategy to ensure that the PHU not only has culturally mindful practices but also looking at the organization, building relationships and meaningful engagement with communities. All foundation team members are participating in the OCAP training and staff who have not received the Ontario Indigenous Cultural Safety Program training have been registered. This program was previously offered to the Board pre-COVID and there will be opportunities for the Board to participate in the new year. The PHU is interviewing for an Epidemiologist. Recruitment has been challenging for the temporary data analyst position. Foundation staff have received certification through LEAN. The discipline is used by organizations to deliver customer value, through efficient operations and quality standards focusing on efficiencies through minimizations of waste, errors, and delays. The PHU is looking at moving forward with recovery, plans to address the significant public health backlog, and ways to support ongoing training and further development of staff. While the PHU continues to respond to the pandemic, and the demand for vaccine clinics remains high across the province, the PHU has planned some debriefing sessions to evaluate it's COVID response.

Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program:

The Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) has been incredibly successful. The PHU presented a business case to the Ministry as part of a request for additional funding. Funding was received but the need has become even greater. The demand demonstrates the need for this program across the region and is also attributed to delays due to COVID. The PHU has met again with the Ministry to request additional funding for the remainder of the year and will continue services.

Emergency Management:

Attended meeting with Deputy Minister Bernie Derible, Deputy Minister & Commissioner Emergency Management Ontario, and leadership across the PHU region. Opportunity to discuss key northern issues and context impacting emergency preparedness and management, including HR capacity, for example, the lack of services, and highway safety impacting communities along the highway 11 corridor. Lessons learned and inequities faced during COVID-19 response were shared to inform emergency preparedness and response.

Infection Prevention and Control Hub (IPAC Hub):

The Ministry has provided temporary funding for the past two years. Funding was received late in the year and the Ministry permitted carrying over the funding. The PHU filled positions however there are challenges to fill long term positions as the funding is not permanent. An evaluation of the IPAC Hub program is underway and advocacy to the province for permanent funding has occurred. In an effort to increase infection prevention control practices and capacity within the PHU region, the remaining budget will be used to offer grants to community

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partners that the PHU has supported with infection prevention and control. Grants may be used for training or to purchase items that support infection prevention and control.

Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention:

The PHU has resumed the Stay on Your Feet Program. The program helps seniors and older adults live at home and reduce the risk of falls and the complications that come from falls requiring hospitalization. The vaccine preventable disease team is sharing fall prevention messaging and resources at all the flu and COVID clinics. Injury rates in the PHU with presentations to the emergency department in the PHU region tend to be higher. The Program coordinator is engaging with Public Health Ontario to provide input around childhood falls.

Harm Reduction:

The PHU continues to address the opioid crisis. The Safe Health Site Timmins (SHST) is up and running. The PHU assisted with the application process for the SHST and continues leading with strong community collaboration in the application for the supervised consumption site. The PHU has a full-time position dedicated to this. The Canadian Mental Health Association will be the operator in Timmins for the permanent site and will be announced shortly in a media release. There are regular meetings with the Timmins and Area Drug Strategy (TADS), and the PHU leads regular working group meetings to support the ongoing application for the Supervised Consumption Services Site (SCS) A presentation to City of Timmins council will be made for ongoing funding to support the temporary site and bridge the gap between the current funding of the UPHN and the provincially funded, permanent Supervised Consumption Services Site (SCS). The application is extensive, requiring policies, procedures, budget and letters of support, and community consultation to be completed.

Human Resources:

The PHU continues to actively recruit for many positions. Recruitment remains challenging as it is across all sectors. Key additions to the PHU have been the hiring of an Indigenous Engagement Specialist.

New Building:

The PHU has met with the Ministry around the need for a new building. The Ministry will be sending the capital application form. The process is extensive and will require much time. The Ministry reviews closely and if going forward they will advise if prior feasibility and needs assessment study would still apply. It is expected that the PHU would receive support with its application for a new building to improve safety, efficiency, staff morale and strengthen programs and services. A follow up meeting with the Ministry will be scheduled.

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Information Technology:

The PHU continues to make improvements. A lot of work has been completed with outside support to increase security processes, procedures, policies and updates to the PHU information technology support. The PHU is migrating to SharePoint online for all internal documents and will move to multifactor authentication by the end of the year. A Program Coordinator has been hired. An acceptable use policy has been implemented. Staff have completed eight modules around I.T. security education.

Respectfully Submitted,
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