

# 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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May 27, 2021

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

### PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

#### Porcupine Health Unit Status

*This table was updated on **Thursday, May 27, 2021, at 2:30 p.m.***

<b>Total Tests Completed*</b>	99,840
<b>Number of cases**</b>	1,225
<b>Active cases</b>	280
<b>Out of region cases</b>	1
<b>Recovered</b>	919
<b>Deceased</b>	26

\*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.

The PHU has 1225 active cases with numbers increasing daily. The PHU is leading the Province in infection rates per 100,000. States of emergencies have been issued in Timmins, Moosonee and Fort Albany and this trend is likely to continue with further states of emergencies being declared. This is a reflection of the impacts on capacities, concern for communities and community members with case numbers increasing. The PHU continues to sound the alarm of heightened awareness that COVID is here, it is present in every community within the PHU region. Any interaction outside of one's household is a risk of COVID exposure regardless of being told if there are cases in a particular setting or community. Vigilance and dedication is required with the measures to reduce the risk for themselves and all other community members. The measures work but they must be followed diligently especially with the variants of concern. Any break in mask use, gathering, or interacting without without distancing, the PHU is witnessing spread. Break times, lunch breaks, meetings in every setting continue to be times of risk where spread is seen. Actively screening daily and staying home with even minor symptoms is critical to reducing spread to others. Thus far, there have been three peaks in this third wave. The third wave started later than other Northern Health Units and it is discouraging for all community members across the region to be in this position when others are seeing improvements. The PHU did well while other regions were facing record increases, and, like others, the region will get through this, and ensuring community support is present at all levels will be the key. While pleased the infection has been mild for so many of the cases, especially given the underlying poorer health status of the population, mild symptoms often mean people continue to work or see others they do not live with, unknowingly increasing spread. In addition, even when people stay home immediately with symptoms, the variants spread more readily and the two days before symptom onset when people are deemed infectious is still leading to significant numbers of close contacts who then often become cases.

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

### PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE (cont'd)

The PHU team has worked to secure PPE for essential workers who are at risk of exposure from the public and or colleagues and providing information on what needs to be done. Promotion and encouragement of the use of a three-ply procedural mask and eye protection, and reminders of the measures required to reduce the risk has been provided to all work settings.

The PHU has also requested support for increased testing capacity for the region, most specifically in Timmins currently to ensure daily public access to testing in the region, and even walk-in opportunities and options in different areas of the community to ensure access for all. The PHU has also requested to have additional test site locations. With an increase of cases in our vulnerable sector it is imperative that we are providing access to services that will help all community members who may not have transportation or have barriers to access testing. Assessment centres across the region have been asked to ensure access to public testing daily, and to increase awareness that individuals may schedule and or walk in as needed. With provincial and other health unit supports for case and contact management and the increasing cases and contacts removing barriers to testing and ensuring access even without a PHU referral is critical.

### Current Provincial Status

Provincial trends:

- Outbreaks have occurred in workplaces, in many sectors
- Often staff break and lunch time are higher risks, as are informal times before or after sports or events or work. Improper and inconsistent use of PPE and measured distancing are trends seen in PHU as well.
- Continue to see private social gatherings as a source of transmission.

Opportunity to learn from these trends in transmission elsewhere and prepare locally

- Limit close contacts to household members.
- Continue to support and promote PH measures in all settings.
- Expanded support for businesses and workplaces – implementation of the measures, physical distancing, medical masks, and eye protection.
- Ongoing IPAC support for LTCH, RH, congregate living settings and workplaces.

### Vaccine Update

Vaccination is dependent on the supply of vaccines, and the provincial framework is implemented locally in an ethical and equitable manner across our vast geography. The PHU is following the Provincial and Ministry Guidance and working with community partners to identify individuals at highest risk of infection and severe illness and outcomes and to those who work in high-risk populations and vulnerable people. As of May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the PHU has been able to administer 47,314 doses in 42,690 individuals. Despite this, all the precautions and measures must remain in place even once people are vaccinated.

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

### PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE (cont'd)

#### Vaccine Update (cont'd)

Vaccine availability greatly impacts the ability to plan. Moderna has been a great option as it is easier to transport, however the predictability and supply continues to be a challenge at times. The PHU is also using

Pfizer, which is a regularly scheduled allocation, and is enabling vaccination for anyone over the age of 12 across the region, very important in addressing the increasing cases and trends of cases at younger ages.

- There are multiple clinics for the next two weeks. The PHU continues to offer vaccine to anyone that has not been vaccinated, those who may have missed the clinic or maybe were hesitant.
- Clinic expansion occurred in a brisk step-down formation beginning with 50+ age band on May 2<sup>nd</sup> to 12+ age band on May 17<sup>th</sup> in response to local concerning trends in cases. The PHU has also moved quickly with second doses and continues to advocate for further Moderna allocations to support second doses in individuals currently eligible.
- The PHU team continues to add clinics with increasing community partner support to ensure access to first and second doses continues in an equitable and efficient manner across the region.
- Pop-up/walk-in/mobile options continue and are a critical strategy to ensure barriers are removed and there is access to vaccine for all community members. So far, over 700 vaccines have been provided at these clinics.

#### Case Bulletin Updates

Epidemiology summaries continue to be posted weekly, and there will be a weekly post sharing pertinent trends from the PHU, other health units and the province overall. Protection of personal health information remains a critical role of the PHU throughout the pandemic for all cases and contacts. Any pertinent information regarding a public health risk or exposure is shared as deemed necessary, and it is shared once the PHU is aware and has assessed the need for it. Again, community members are reminded of the need to follow the measures to reduce the risk and act as though exposure is possible and probable every day with every interaction, regardless of case announcements.

#### Contact Tracing

PHU case and contact tracing team (CCM) continue to experience an increase in work with the surge in cases. The increase in work required additional support with vaccine clinic duties so that trained PHU CCM staff could return to this work and respond to the surge. The PHU continues to staff two shifts, 7 days a week to respond to the needed response to cases, in addition to receiving supports from provincial work force and other health units

#### COVID-19 In the Workplace

Outbreak management in various workplace settings has increased. Education of measures, follow up inspections and provision of PPE in all workplace settings has been ongoing to ensure compliance. Even when an outbreak is not present the team follows up with settings to review measures in place, provide any education or reinforcement of the measures to strengthen the steps needed to reduce the risk for all.

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

### **PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE** (cont'd)

#### COVID-19 In the Workplace (cont'd)

Community support in all settings is imperative to reduce the risk. Following measures diligently is required, especially with variants circulating. Spread is seen when people do not wear masks, do not wear them properly, when distancing is not in place, when people go to work with symptoms. This is critical even if settings are not open to the public.

#### COVID-19 INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL (IPAC)

Ongoing weekly meetings with Acute and primary care partners; as well as LTCH/RH across the region include review of recommendations, guidance, and ongoing strategies to strengthen IPAC measures. Audits, review of PPE, donning and doffing, public health measures have all been recommended as ongoing response to the pandemic

#### PHU Staff Support

The PHU remains committed to the precautions to protect all staff and clients, and appreciates the ongoing commitment to these measures, policies, and protocols in all PHU offices. Weekly all staff videoconference updates continue. Regular review of the public health measures in offices continues.

### **ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS**

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

#### Environmental Health

The follow up of Tuberculosis, and other reportable diseases, such as food borne illnesses, occurs on a regular basis. As well, the Public Health Inspectors continue to complete the compliance inspections as per the Ministry of Health.

Environmental health also works very collaboratively with the COVID Response Team, they assist in the response to COVID outbreaks in congregate settings, long term care, schools, workplaces.

#### Opioid Response

There continues to be an internal team responding to the ongoing opioid crisis and working on the broader drug strategy and opioid response with partners. Unfortunately, this is another area that continues to be an emergency for the PHU region with far too many tragic outcomes. The region continues to see the concerning trend of increased overdose events and remains in a red alert.

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

### ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS (cont'd)

#### Opioid Response (cont'd)

The PHU works to increase the word, decrease stigma, get Naloxone into hands of those who need it and work collaboratively with partners in mental health and addictions. An in-depth report was provided by Dr. Catton on the Opioid Crisis facing the PHU region.

#### Health and Well Being Schools

Schools have had a significant surge in cases, and outbreaks prior to the closure. The team continues to meet weekly with the Boards of Education and will continue to work with them to support mental health and wellness in the schools as well as other programs. While in-person learning is widely recognized as critical for children and youth, and so important for the health and well-being of families across the PHU, the current numbers and community spread would not be supportive of in-person learning. Public health and the PHU have always supported schools being the first to open and the last to close for this reason. Unfortunately, at this time, the evidence and data are overwhelming that currently the infection rates would not support this in the PHU. There has also been no decision shared by the province.

#### Human Resources

The PHU continues to hire many staff to support the COVID-19 response, to support the vaccination program and the ongoing public health programs that are needed to provide to the population.

#### Hiring

The following permanent positions were recently filled.

- Bookkeeper – Payroll & Benefits, Timmins, (due to retirement)
- Community Health Nurse (RPN), Moosonee, (due to resignation)
- Infection Prevention and Control Specialist, Timmins (new position)
- Public Health Inspector-In-Training, Timmins (due to resignation)
- Harm Reduction Outreach Worker, Timmins (additional funding)

The following temporary full-time positions were recently filled. These vacancies were created to support COVID-19 response and/or replace leaves of absence.

- Graduate BScN Nurses (5), Timmins, Case and Contact Management/Vaccine Clinic
- Health Promoter – Vaccine Program, Timmins

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

### Human Resources (cont'd)

#### Hiring (cont'd)

- Health Promoter - Hearst (support required due to 2 maternity leaves unable to fill)
- Human Resources Associate, -Timmins
- Public Health Students - Supporting different areas - Vaccine Clinics, Communications. - CCM, Administrative  
Hearst - 1  
Kapusking - 2  
Cochrane - 1  
Matheson - 1  
Timmins - 14
- Covid Response Assistants (phone lines) (1), -Timmins
- Administrative Assistant, -Timmins

Additional Immunizers have been hired on a casual basis in the following office areas. Most immunizers are also travelling to other office areas.

- Timmins - 7
- Hearst - 1
- Kapuskasing - 3
- Hornepayne - 1
- Cochrane/Iroquois Falls/Matheson - 3

#### Leave of Absence

- Administrative Assistant, Timmins, May 2021 to November 2022.
- Public Health Nurse, Hearst, June 7, 2021, to June 2022.

Since October 2020, 121 additional staff have been hired on a temporary full-time/part-time or casual basis.

#### Current Challenges:

- Recruiting Public Health Nurse for 2 maternity leave vacancies in Hearst. Hired a Health Promoter to provide support. Recruitment efforts now focused on new nurse graduates.
- Increased challenge to recruit qualified bilingual Administrative Assistants.

Respectfully Submitted,  
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