

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:
 Dr. Lianne Catton
 Medical Officer of Health – Chief Executive Officer
 December 13, 2021



MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

Porcupine Health Unit Status

*This table was updated on **Wednesday, December 8, 2021, at 12:00 p.m.***

Total Tests Completed*	134,991
Number of cases**	2,311
Active cases	34
Out of region cases	0
Recovered	2,246
Deceased	31

**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 currently has 34 active cases with a total case count to date of 2,311. Provincially the case count today was 1500 cases with a positivity rate greater than 5%. The omicron variant spreads rapidly and is expected to be the dominant strain within days to weeks. As per the trend across the Province, the PHU region is seeing alarming spread. There is a continued trend that social gatherings, workplace gatherings, and break times have led to spread. There is increasing concern over holiday gatherings and the potential misperception that once vaccinated, measures are no longer applicable. While those vaccinated may get infected and spread COVID; it is less likely, and protection against severe disease, hospitalization and ICU admission remains strong. Booster doses are important in preventing a mild or asymptomatic infection with omicron. The layers of protection remain critical to protect health care and other sector capacities and to protect the most vulnerable. Meetings are scheduled with Municipal Leadership, Hospital CEOs, Primary Care Leads, and others across the region to continue to support and promote vaccines and that the public health measures remain critical. Diligence with masking, screening, distancing, hand washing, not going out in public, or attending work with any symptoms whether people are vaccinated or not is still a requirement. Recommendations to support work from home as much as possible and to limit close contact with others whether vaccinated or not will help limit the spread of omicron. The PHU team continues to work 7 days a week to protect communities and especially those who are more vulnerable from a poor outcome from COVID.

Vaccine Update

The PHU is reporting 27.4% first doses for 5–11-year-age band and 89.5% first doses and 85.1% second doses for 12+ years of age. In terms of third doses, the PHU region is not where it needs to be based on the omicron modelling, and as expected, the region is experiencing an increase in cases.

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Ongoing planning with community partners continues to provide expanded options and larger vaccine clinics across the region. The team continues to provide first and second doses and now is planning increasing capacity

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE (cont'd)

Vaccine Update (cont'd)

for third doses across the PHU communities as directed by the Ministry. There is a meeting tomorrow with Mayors, Hospital CEOs, Emergency Control Group Leads and others from across the region with gratitude for renewed support from all partners to maximize vaccine opportunities in light of the modelling of the next wave with omicron.

COVID-19 In the Workplace

The PHU issued a letter to workplaces and businesses outlining a need for a continuation of the measures in addition to vaccination to protect staff and communities by preventing outbreaks and an increase in cases. The Northeast has seen a significant growth in cases. The region has seen some of the highest case rates and outbreak numbers in the Province, with Sudbury, Algoma and Timiskaming health units experiencing record levels of cases. The PHU has seen record rates before and there is a need to act now to prevent similar trends here again.

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 is also responding to other urgent and emergent public health protection issues and work continues in other public health programs.

Opioid Response

The opioid emergency continues to be a tremendous crisis for the PHU region. The PHU continues to see tragic lives lost and Families impacted. This important work cannot be put aside for COVID vaccine clinics or case and contact management needs. It is an emergency response in of itself that requires ongoing attention and increasing capacity. The PHU continues to work with Timmins and District Hospital and other partners on the Timmins and Area Drug Strategy (TADS) Steering Committee with respect to moving forward with the urgent public health needs site in the new year. The urgent public health needs site will provide opportunity to save lives, provide a safe, supportive space, the opportunity to prevent overdose and to connect clients with other critical support and services. The emergency response task force continues to monitor local trends related to suspected opioid related overdose events and shares alerts, harm reduction and overdose prevention messaging. The team continues to work to expand naloxone availability across the region.

Environmental Health

The PHU is working with a First Nation community, Indigenous Services Canada, Provincial and Federal Partners, and Health Care Partners to support the response to another very significant and extremely concerning outbreak.

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Immunization

The PHU continues with the COVID vaccination program while planning to support catch up in other vaccine programs. Ongoing concerns with respect to Tuberculosis, infectious disease follow up and Healthy Babies, Healthy Children continue. The PHU is hopeful to see an uptake in all the vaccine programs as neither the PHU, nor our region's acute care sector has the capacity to support other outbreaks or a resurgence in other infectious diseases at this point in time.

Health and Well Being Program: Schools

The PHU continues to meet weekly with the Directors of Education, to support the response to COVID, and will continue to work with them to support mental health and wellness in the schools as well as other programs.

Human Resources

PHU Staff attended a half day Winter Conference. A guest speaker addressed the topic of stigma associated with opioid addiction. Long service awards were presented to staff in recognition of their years of dedication to public health and the PHU. There is ongoing work to support staff safety, and ongoing monitoring of vaccine clinics due to previous concerns locally and ongoing concerns across the province. To enhance staff support around safety, the PHU offered three online sessions that provided staff the opportunity to explore tools for safety, to mitigate and deescalate situations. 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 required.

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