

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
October 20, 2021

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

*This table was updated on **Wednesday, October 20, 2021, at 12:00 p.m.***

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|-------------------------------|---------|
| Total Tests Completed* | 127,409 |
| Number of cases** | 2,220 |
| Active cases | 5 |
| Out of region cases | 0 |
| Recovered | 2,184 |
| 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 5 active cases with a total case count to date of 2,220. The PHU region is holding its own in the fourth wave but there is evidence of COVID infection and activity present in several communities across the region. It is important to reflect that PHU's third wave, which was very significant, occurred later than other regions within the Province and while the region was in shutdown, with schools, restaurants, and shops closed during that time. While things may be currently stable, the potential is always present that the PHU could once again experience a sudden uptick in cases. Despite significant and excellent vaccine rates, there are still approximately 30,000 individuals who remain unvaccinated within the PHU. This is a considerable risk that could result in significant outbreaks, case numbers and even tragic outcomes. The PHU will continue to work with partners and municipalities to ensure required measures remain in place including the implementation of the new vaccine passport, and the continuation of case and contact management as the PHU increases the region's vaccination rate.

PHU Vaccine rates for first doses are at 88.6% over the age of 12, which is higher than the provincial rate, and 81.3% for second doses over the age of 12 which is slightly under the provincial average.

The Case and Contact Management team continues to work diligently on case and contact management. The region is a hub for those travelling to and from work from other health unit regions. Often, the team is following cases in individuals who are present in the PHU region that are not counted or reported publicly. The message continues to remain that COVID is circulating within the region and vigilance must be maintained.

The Province has now released the QR code as part of the enhanced vaccine certificate. The public can save an electronic version of their vaccine certificate with a QR code to their phone or print a paper copy.

The Ministry has advised that businesses will accept both electronic and paper versions. The vaccine receipt without the QR code will remain valid and accepted. Proof of vaccination along with a piece of identification including name and date of birth must be shown when visiting businesses and organizations. The Verify Ontario

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app has also been released and is for the business sector to use. The app can be used without internet connection and will allow for businesses to quickly confirm the vaccination status of an individual entering their establishment. The PHU continues to work with businesses and an educational session has been planned with the Chamber and other partners around implementation, enforcement, and compliance. Weekly meetings with by-law members from across the region provide opportunity to share information and resources to support one another. The PHU is appreciative of all bylaw enforcement support provided by the municipalities.

The PHU has experienced a series of events that are concerning and ongoing. The first involves social media with increasing comments that are threatening, racist, inappropriate, unkind, and disrespectful. This has been happening throughout the pandemic, but it has escalated to a point that is completely unacceptable, and it cannot be tolerated. The PHU has issued a zero-tolerance statement that has been shared. Comments will no longer be permitted on the PHU Facebook page. The PHU does not have the time or capacity to police and monitor unhealthy comments that are not only harmful to the PHU staff but also the community members. Appropriate questions received through personal messages, emails, and phone service will be answered.

The second concern involves Public Health Inspectors going into premises and experiencing disrespectful and harassing or threatening behaviour. The Health Protection and Promotion Act, and Regulations of Reopening Ontario Act, requires Public Health Inspectors to enter premises to educate, to perform inspections to assess compliance and respond to complaints. Unfortunately, there are now a few premises that the inspection team will not be entering without police presence. Community Control Groups are sharing concerns of non-compliance in premises within the region. A focus on education and support when it comes to the vaccine proof will continue, but enforcement will occur if the public health measures in place for many months now are not being followed. These actions put our communities at risk. The same kindness and respect we have asked for on behalf of restaurants and businesses implementing the requirements needs to be extended to the entire Porcupine Health Unit team as well.

The third concern involves vaccine clinics. The PHU have had some inappropriate and aggressive behaviour and comments directed at staff. Meetings have occurred with O.P.P. and Timmins Police. Policies and procedures are underway, and clinic schedules have been provided to law enforcement agencies. The PHU has received support from Community Partners with their attendance at clinics and is appreciative of the assistance. Steps will be taken to further support staff with all of these very concerning challenges.

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PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE (cont'd)

Vaccine Update

Vaccine rates for 12+ are at 88.6% for first doses 81.3% for second doses and there has been 105,273 vaccine doses administered thus far. The PHU is slightly lower than the provincial average for second doses.

The PHU team continues to work incredibly hard to continue to offer a variety of options for vaccination to reduce potential barriers.

Planning is underway around third doses, and the PHU will be ready to mobilize once an announcement has been made. Across the region, flu clinics and grades 7 & 8 catch up vaccination opportunities are also proposed. The Province is to release further information and guidance around the vaccine passport for workplaces. Pfizer has applied for ages 5-11 to Health Canada and approval is expected.

The PHU is supportive of the vaccine mandates and vaccine policies seen across the Province. The vaccine mandates offer an opportunity to protect those who are working, attending school, enjoying recreational activities and those who cannot be vaccinated. The PHU is aware that our region has a significantly high rate of the population who are at greater risk for adverse events due to COVID. The PHU has updated their vaccine policy which is in line with directives issued from Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Kieran Moore for Long Term Care Homes. Likely, the Province will see updates for Acute Care, Hospitals, and other sectors of the Health care system. It is incredibly important as Public Health, that we stand behind this for our Institution and Team who are often working with at risk population and the vulnerable.

School Program

School COVID support continues, but also assessments around other concerns such as mental health are occurring. The team continues to provide support, but the capacity to do so is limited and challenging.

The PHU team continues to meet weekly with the Boards of Education and Timiskaming Health Unit. Schools have returned to in person learning and the PHU team will continue to support staff and students, provide guidance and direction as required. The PHU recognizes that in-person learning is critical for children and youth, and so important for the health and well-being of families across the PHU.

COVID-19 In the Workplace

Education of measures, follow up inspections and provision of PPE in all workplace settings has been ongoing. Even when there is no declared outbreak, the team follows up in 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. 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, and when people go to work with symptoms. This is critical even if workplaces or settings are not open to the public.

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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

Continual work is being done to address climate change. This work is not only important but very relevant for our region. The PHU is pleased to be involved in larger research projects around that and will be engaging with municipalities in the future. Currently the PHU is working on information gathering and outreach while we wait for the final Vulnerability and Assessment Study from the Climate Change Collaboration Project.

Opioid Response

The opioid crisis continues to have great impact on the PHU region. The PHU is working on the urgent public health needs site (UPHNS) application, as well as the long-term supervised consumption services site. The Timmins & District Hospital has stepped up to be the Operator for the UPHNS and the City of Timmins is supporting with funding support for the operation. This work increases the profile of the urgent concerns around mental health and substance use across the region.

Information and Technology (IT)

The PHU is working with an IT consultant to outline next steps to address required updates.

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. Funding continues to ensure staff capacity for the ongoing required pandemic response.

Hiring

Permanent positions:

- Public Health Dietitian, Timmins (resignation)

Temporary positions:

- Administrative Assistant, Timmins (maternity leave replacement)
- Program Coordinator, IPAC, Timmins (reassignment IPAC funding)
- Program Coordinator, Infectious Diseases, Timmins (reassignment permanent PC)
- Public Health Nurse, Timmins, Full-Time (maternity leave replacement)
- Covid Response Assistants, Casual (7), Timmins and Branch offices
- RPN, RNs, Casual (5) Timmins and Branch offices

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Human Resources (cont'd)

Extensions:

- Casual RN, RPN, Timmins (16) – extended to March 31, 2022
- Casual RN, RPN, Branch offices (15) – extended to March 31, 2022
- Casual Covid Response Assistants, Timmins (12) – extended to March 31, 2022
- Casual Covid Response Assistants, Branch offices (5) – extended to March 31, 2022
- Program Coordinator, Harm Reduction – temporary extended to December 31, 2022

Leave of Absence

- Administrative Assistant, Timmins – November 2021 for 18 months

Resignations

- Health Promoter – School Health, FT Permanent Timmins
- Public Health Nurse – Temporary FT Timmins
- CCM Support – Temporary FT Timmins

Respectfully Submitted,
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Porcupine Health Unit