

# 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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September 9, 2021



## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

### PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

#### Porcupine Health Unit Status

*This table was updated on **Thursday, September 9, 2021, at 12:00 p.m.***

<b>Total Tests Completed*</b>	121,638
<b>Number of cases**</b>	2,186
<b>Active cases</b>	12
<b>Out of region cases</b>	0
<b>Recovered</b>	2,143
<b>Deceased</b>	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 Province and the PHU are preparing for a fourth wave this Fall which will be driven by the Delta variant. The PHU is well versed in addressing and managing this variant which spreads much more rapidly and can cause much more severe illness. The modelling dictates it will be a pandemic that largely involves the unvaccinated. There will be break-through cases, but those cases will be much less frequent, experience less severe symptoms, and are much less likely be hospitalized or admitted to the ICU, and to see significantly fewer tragic outcomes. It is incredibly important that the vaccination rate within the PHU increase to 90% for first doses for herd immunity.

The PHU currently has 12 active cases with a total case count to date of 2,186 with most of these cases documented in the third wave. The PHU region, communities and PHU staff are still recovering from the third wave and the PHU recognize how discouraging it is to hear we are entering a fourth wave. The PHU recognizes that our region has not had the time between waves that other health units have had. It is important to recognize that the significant wave that the PHU experienced was during shut down. It is also important to recognize and that our vaccination rates are an incredibly important key that will get us through this, but so is the continuation of the following of public health measures, regardless of vaccination status of any individual, or workplace setting.

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 as well as the adverse events

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

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

#### Porcupine Health Unit Status (cont'd)

related to COVID that are not due to a direct infection, but due to isolation, economic disparity, substance use, mental health, and physical wellness. The PHU is working on resources to support organizations looking to implement vaccine policies.

The PHU region is participating in a provincial MECP COVID-19 wastewater surveillance program. The communities of Kapuskasing, Moosonee and Timmins have their wastewater monitored for a potential presence of COVID-19 genetic components. A media release has been shared with residents of the PHU. Most health unit areas have two areas but the PHU requested that three communities participate due to our large region.

The Ministry and the Province has announced that the mitigation funding to offset the cost sharing change which led to the proposal of increased municipal cost share versus provincial share in 2019, will continue in 2022 to support health units.

#### Vaccine Update

Vaccination rates within the PHU region have experienced an increase with the provincial vaccine passport, the return to school, and organizational mandates such as the NOHA policy announcement, that those over the age of 12 involved in minor hockey will have to be vaccinated. It is expected that other organizations and sectors will follow suit.

Vaccine rates for 12+ are at 81.3% for first doses 72.4% for second doses. The PHU is lower than the provincial average, but rates have been increasing over the past two weeks with an increase in first doses. The PHU team is working incredibly hard and continue to offer a variety of options for vaccination to reduce potential barriers. Mobile clinics in partnership with EMS will be offered in many communities within the PHU region. Clinics will also be offered in schools, at back-to-school shopping locations, in various workplaces and in partnership with workplaces and industry. The PHU has offered more online presentations for parents in both French and English to address vaccine hesitancy and to answer questions or concerns around the vaccine.

The Province is to release further information and guidance around the vaccine passport for workplaces. Studies for vaccination of the 5–11-year-old age band have been underway for some time now and it is expected that Pfizer will submit application to Health Canada for approval this Fall. The PHU has seen increasing protests at recent vaccine clinics. While individuals have a right to protest, there has been threatening and inappropriate behaviour at clinics, towards the public in attendance at as well as PHU staff. The PHU has been working closely with Timmins Police Services, O.P.P., N.A.P.S., local security services and other partners to ensure that all in attendance are safe and supported. These protests are occurring across the province and concern for the safety of clinic attendees and staff has been raised at Provincial tables.

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

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

#### Vaccine Update (cont'd)

#### 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 or exposure announcements.

#### Contact Tracing

Case and contact management are ongoing. Outbreak prevention and supporting workplaces with respect to the public health measures, current regulations and vaccine mandates are being addressed as required.

#### COVID-19 In the Workplace

Education of measures, follow up inspections and provision of PPE in all workplace settings has been ongoing to ensure compliance. 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.

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

Ongoing regular 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.

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

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

#### 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

In addition to the important response and support of the COVID-19 pandemic the Environmental Health Team was able to complete 100% of their high-risk food premise inspections by August 31, 2021.

Continual work is being done to address climate change. The PHU region continues to see an increase in fires and floods. 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.

The PHU has documented its first case of Rabies within a bat. The PHU recommends the treatment of all exposure to rabies as suspected positive until it is proven negative. Public communication has been issued as well as to health care providers advising the potential presence of rabies within communities, and the guidance for managing patients with potential exposure.

##### Immunization

It is important that the PHU continues with the COVID vaccination program while planning to support catch up in other vaccine programs. 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.

#### PORCUPINE HEALTH UNIT ORAL HEALTH, VISION AND SPEECH SERVICES

##### Preschool Speech and Language

The Pre-School Speech and Language program has hired a temporary FTE with some additional funding the PHU received. This has allowed the program to continue with the offering of virtual therapy for those who require speech therapy assistance as well as increase to in person assessments for those who required additional support.

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

The infant hearing program continues to be in person by the Pre-School Speech and Language Assistants. The Program Co-ordinator is going to be providing a one-hour presentation to the French daycares looking at second language acquisition and addressing how they can support this.

### Dental Services

The Ontario Senior's Dental Care Program has seen an increase of 65 new applicants due to media promotions. Currently we have 185 low-income seniors enrolled in this program.

The Fluoride Varnish Program which is very instrumental in reducing dental carries in young ones will return this Fall. Traditionally our carries rate is very high, and the return of the Fluoride Varnish Program is welcome news. The CDSSAB Board has given permission to resume this, and all COVID-19 precautions will be followed. The importance of resuming this program is great as this group has likely been greatly impacted due to the lack of services offered due to COVID. COHI services will also be resuming to First Nation communities. Community leadership has been consulted and PHU has been granted permission to enter the COHI communities that the PHU serves.

In addition to these programs the Dental and Speech teams have provided much needed support to the pandemic response.

### Information and Technology (IT)

Unfortunately, last week the PHU experienced an incident where the e-mail server was down. Additional IT updates will be required. Communication was issued to advise the Ministry, and Community Partners of this situation, however, phone systems, social media platforms, web site and clinic booking system were still functioning during this period. The PHU is working with an IT consultant to further debrief the situation and outline next steps.

### Population Health Status Report

The PHU Health Status report was distributed over the summer. The report is an excellent document that was produced during the pandemic and outlines the state of the PHU region in comparison to the health of the Province. Unfortunately, since the compilation of the data, it is likely that several indicators have worsened attributed to the impacts on health, and access to services, treatment, and care during the pandemic. This report will assist with the region's recovery and planning for public health priorities and supporting other sectors.

## MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE **ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS** (cont'd)

### School Program

The PHU team has resumed meeting weekly with the Boards of Education and Timiskaming Health Unit and will continue to work with them to support mental health and wellness in the schools as well as other programs. 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.

### 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. Ongoing funding to ensure staff capacity for the ongoing pandemic.

Respectfully Submitted,  
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Porcupine Health Unit