

January 12, 2021	Community Update #17	COVID-19	Dr. Ian Gemmill, Acting Medical Officer of Health
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The COVID-19 pandemic situation continues to evolve. As local and provincial activity increases, the Health Unit is once again providing a synopsis of the latest information to help to ensure that community members stay up-to-date.

What's New:

- As of today, the province is announcing there are 222,023 confirmed cases in Ontario, and 5,053 deaths. There have been 186,829 resolved cases.
- Within the HKPR District Health Unit area, there are 667 confirmed cases, and 27 deaths of people confirmed to have COVID-19. There are five outbreaks. As of January 1, 2021, HKPR is providing the locations of all declared outbreaks on its website.

State of Emergency Issued:

- On January 12, 2021, the Ontario government [issued](#) a second State of Emergency Order. Among the key measures:
 - A Stay-at-Home Order takes effect on at 12:01 am on January 14. It requires everyone to remain at home, except to go out for groceries, medicines, accessing health care services, exercise or for essential work. Anyone not complying with the stay-at-home order could face fines or prosecution.
 - All businesses must ensure that any employee who can work from home does so.
- The following additional public health measures take effect between Jan. 12 and Jan. 14, These include:
 - Outdoor organized public gatherings and social gatherings are further restricted to a limit of five people with limited exceptions.
 - Individuals are required to wear a mask or face covering in the indoor areas of businesses or organizations that are open. Wearing a mask or face covering is now recommended outdoors when you can't physically distance more than two metres.
 - All non-essential retail stores, including hardware stores, alcohol retailers, and those offering curbside pickup or delivery, can only be open from 7 am to 8 pm.
 - Non-essential construction is further restricted, including below-grade construction, exempting survey.
 - Schools in COVID-19 hotspots (York, Peel, Windsor-Essex, Hamilton and Toronto) are closed for in-person instruction until Feb. 10. By Jan. 20, the Chief Public Health Officer of Health will advise when in-person learning for students in other parts of Ontario can resume. Currently schools are slated to return on Jan. 25. In the meantime, teacher-led remote learning will continue for all students.
- Other health and safety measures in schools include:
 - Masks must now be worn in Grades 1-3. Requirements are also in place for mask use outdoors.
 - Enhanced screening protocols
 - Expanded targeted testing.
 - Childcare centres for non-school aged will remain open.
- New and enhanced enforcement measures are in place to ensure these measures are followed. OPP officers, local police services, municipal bylaw officers and provincial workplace inspectors will be able to issue tickets for non-compliance.
- Ministry of Labour inspectors will carry out an inspection and education workplace campaign to ensure businesses and other workplaces follow all COVID-19 safety protocols.

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Vaccine Distribution:

- The Provincial government oversees the vaccine distribution program. They are using a phased-in approach and have identified the priority populations and timelines (dependent upon vaccine availability).
- The province is currently in the first phase of vaccine distribution, and has identified hospital staff, and staff, essential care givers and residents of long-term care homes and retirement homes in areas with the highest number of cases as the first priority group to be immunized. As additional doses of vaccines become available, phase one vaccinations will increase throughout the province.
- As of today, there is no confirmed timeline for the vaccine to arrive in our local area. The situation is fluid, and health units have been told to plan for the arrival of the vaccine in its area.
- The Health Unit is currently working with its hospitals and health care partners to plan for the first phase of vaccinations in our area. This will include hospital staff, and staff, essential care givers and residents of long-term care homes and retirement homes.
- When the province receives more vaccine doses later this winter or early in the spring, we will move to the second phase and the people who are scheduled to be immunized will be expanded. There currently is no local sign-up list for the vaccines, as the order has not been determined by the provincial government.
- People who will be immunized in the second phase include essential health care workers, older adults, people who are at risk, and then all adults. It is expected that this second phase of vaccination will take place later in the spring and into the summer.
- The Health Unit is working closely with the province, our area hospitals, health care partners, and local long-term care and retirement homes to prepare for the time when the vaccine is available locally. When we have details on its arrival, the Health Unit will be sharing information through the media, our website, and social media.
- Until residents can be immunized, they should be sure to continue following the public health recommendations: stay home if you are ill; avoid non-essential travel; do not gather with others outside of your immediate household; if you do need to go out for essential trips (groceries etc.), wear a mask that covers your nose and mouth; continue to maintain a physical distance of six feet from others; wash your hands thoroughly and frequently or use hand sanitizer.
- The province has released COVID-19 Vaccinations for Special Populations.
- The province has released a number of documents/links to provide additional information about the vaccines and the distribution plan: COVID-19: About Vaccines; COVID-19 Vaccine Availability and Rollout; Vaccine Aftercare Sheet; Vaccination Recommendations for Special Populations.
- At the end of December, the provincial government [released](#) an [Ethical Framework](#) for COVID-19 vaccine distribution which was developed in partnership with the COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Task Force [to guide further vaccine prioritization and distribution](#) across the province.

Provincial Shutdown:

- The provincial shutdown that went into effect December 26, 2020 is still in place. The shutdown is scheduled to be in effect until January 23, 2021. For specific details about the shutdown, click on the [Province-Wide Shutdown – Government of Ontario Guidance Document](#) that details the new regulations and what businesses are allowed to open, operate in modified format or be shut.

COVID-19 Response Framework

- During the provincial shutdown, Ontario's colour-coded [COVID-19 Response Framework](#) has been paused.
- Although the HKPR District Health Unit was in the Yellow-Protect category when the province shutdown went into effect, increasing case counts and hospitalizations would mean the Health Unit would have moved into the Orange-Restrict Category.
- Under this category, there is a change in the provincial guideline governing when an outbreak should be declared at a long-term care or retirement home.
- Going forward, the HKPR District Health Unit will declare an outbreak at a retirement or long-term care home with the notification of one confirmed case, even if the person does not have any symptoms, has not had any exposure

- to a case. Previously, an asymptomatic person with no exposure would have been considered a low pre-test probability and told to isolate and to get a second test. In most cases, the second test was negative, and an outbreak was not declared.
- With the new guidelines, an outbreak will automatically be declared for every positive test, according to provincial guidelines.

Recent Provincial Announcements:

- The Ontario government has [announced](#) new voluntary testing at Toronto Pearson International Airport for eligible international travellers returning to Ontario. Note that such travellers should have travelled ONLY for essential reasons.

HKPR Actions:

- With the increase in local cases, the Health Unit has moved back into “surge” response, drawing most staff back into pandemic response work. As a result, there are two shifts of Health Unit staff working seven days a week until 6:30 pm for case investigations, contact tracing and outbreak declaration and follow-up.
- With the State of Emergency Order issued by the province, all three HKPR District Health Unit offices will close effective January 14, 2021. Members of the public can call the Health Unit at 1-866-888-4577 or email info@hkpr.on.ca.
- The Health Unit is continuing to update its website to include new and seasonal information. Information has recently been added to provide further information about the vaccine distribution, as well as information on winter activities, donating to food banks, and outdoor skating and skating rinks.
- There are currently five COVID-19 outbreaks within the Health Unit’s area. Updates on all outbreaks is provided on the Health Unit’s [website](#).
- The Health Unit continues to participate in regular calls with the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health, our health partners, our school board partners, our municipal partners, and our Community Emergency Management Groups (CEMCs) to share information and provide updates.
- Remember to stay up-to-date on the latest information by visiting these sites:
 - The Ontario Ministry of Health (www.ontario.ca/coronavirus)
 - Public Health Ontario website (www.publichealthontario.ca)
 - Public Health Agency of Canada (www.canada.ca/coronavirus)