

# Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health


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**Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer**


*November 26, 2025*

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# Medical Officer of Health Update

## *Respiratory Virus Update*

Vaccination against RSV (for eligible individuals), COVID-19, and influenza began in October for individuals at higher risk and health care professionals and became available to the general public at the start of November.

There is emerging evidence that the H3N2 influenza A virus has been evolving more rapidly than usual during the northern hemisphere's 2024-25 respiratory season and during the southern hemisphere's 2025 season<sup>1</sup>. As a result, the A(H3N2) strain expected to circulate during the 2025-26 respiratory season is mismatched to this year's influenza vaccine.

Currently in Ontario, influenza percent positivity is increasing but remains very low. Therefore, this potential mismatch does not appear to be having a significant impact on outcomes such as hospitalizations and outbreaks at this time. Even with a mismatch, the influenza vaccine is still expected to offer protection against other influenza strains and some protection against the H3N2 strain. It continues to be recommended, particularly for those at higher risk of severe outcomes.

Percent positivity of COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) remain low.

## *2025 Ontario Public Health Standards*

The working draft of the 2025 Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) was distributed to health units on September 25, 2025. Since then, the Ministry has been hosting information sessions on various components of the new standards. The 2025 OPHS are scheduled to take effect January 2, 2025, though at the time of writing, several components remain incomplete. The Substance Use Prevention standard has not yet been released, nor have 6 of the 27 associated protocols.

Recognizing these gaps, and that most health units had begun planning prior to the release, the Ministry has acknowledged that 2026 will serve as a "transition" year. The 2026 Annual Service Plan (ASP) reporting template will be adjusted accordingly.

At the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, program and budget planning began prior to the release of the new OPHS. Staff were instructed to continue planning based on the 2021 OPHS. The 2026 Organizational Operational Documents, which outline program work for the year, will be considered "evergreen" and updated throughout 2026 as we adapt to the new OPHS and as the Ministry releases additional guidance materials to support their implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> Sabaiduc, S; Kaweski, SE; Separovic, L; Gao, R; Ranadheera, C; Bastien, N; Skowronski, D. (2025) Emergence of seasonal influenza A(H3N2) variants with immune escape potential warrants enhanced molecular and epidemiological surveillance for the 2025-2026 season. *Journal of the Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease Canada*: 10(4); doi 10.3138/jammi-2025-0025.

# Programs and Services Updates

## Corporate Services

### *Facilities Operations*

#### **North Bay**

- Completed seasonal fall preventative maintenance for all heating and ventilating systems.
- Awarded snow plowing and sanding contract.
- Outside water lines were flushed and prepared for the winter season.
- Prepped exterior areas for winter (flower beds, salt bins).
- Three new vaccine fridges ordered to replace outdated units.
- Completed annual fire suppression system inspection.

#### **Parry Sound**

- Fall preventative maintenance for all heating and ventilating systems conducted. Secured a new contract for 2026.

### *Information Technology*

- Added Microsoft Teams meeting functionality to the Human Resources meeting room.
- Upgraded firmware on all photocopiers to enable Microsoft Universal Print compatibility.
- Softphone functionality integrated to Microsoft Teams.
- As part of ongoing technology lifecycle management, all organizational computers (210) were upgraded to Windows 11 in advance of Microsoft's October 14, end-of-support date for Windows 10. This ensures continued security, performance, and vendor support across all systems.

### *Human Resources*

#### **Occupational Health, Safety, and Wellness**

Employee wellness events held in September and October included lunchtime trivia, creation of program/service gratitude collages, and Halloween activities. The Holiday all Staff meeting will be occurring in December.

Staff will soon be invited to participate in a workplace survey developed by the Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) seeking input on general occupational health and safety, workplace violence, and psychological health and safety.

Seasonal staff immunization clinics have started, with the Public Health Nurse immunizing 66 employees against influenza and 42 against COVID-19 thus far.

### **Professional Development**

Recent compliance training offerings:

- Basic Life Support re-certification – 64 participants
- Basic Life Support full certification – 8 participants
- Basic Life Support Instructor re-certification – 3 participants

External professional development:

- Indigenous Cultural Safety Training (North Bay Indigenous Hub) - 29 participants
- Leaders for Leaders Management Empowerment Training Sessions – 18 participants

### **Staffing**

In addition to filling temporary positions, the following permanent positions were recently filled:

- Community Health Promoter, Sexual Health & Harm Reduction Services (1.00 FTE), effective September 8, 2025
- Program Manager, Oral Health (1.00 FTE), effective September 24, 2025
- Bilingual Community Health Promoter, Community Health (1.00 FTE), effective October 14, 2025
- Clinical Coordinator, Oral Health (1.00 FTE), effective October 16, 2024
- Accountant, Finance (1.00 FTE), effective November 3, 2025
- Human Resources Coordinator – Talent Management, Human Resources (1.00 FTE), effective November 17, 2025

There has been a net increase in permanent positions of 1.0 FTE.

### *Finance*

The Finance Team has submitted the following documents:

- 2025 Q3 Ministry of Health Standards Activity Report
- 2025-26 Q2 Infection Prevention and Control Hub Report
- 2025-25 Q2 Planet Youth Report

## Clinical Services

### *Communicable Disease Control*

#### **National Infection Control Week**

October 20 to 25, 2025, marked National Infection Control Week. This year's theme, "Bridging Gaps, Building Bridges," emphasized the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing among healthcare professionals to enhance infection prevention practices. This theme encouraged healthcare teams to work together across disciplines and care settings to improve patient safety and quality of care.

#### **Lyme Disease Update**

Lyme disease is an infection transmitted through the bite of an infected blacklegged tick. Most human cases result from exposure to areas where infected ticks are established. These established tick populations continue to expand across Ontario, increasing the risk of exposure in more regions of the province.

Early symptoms may include fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, fatigue, and an expanding red rash often referred to as a "bull's-eye" rash. In Ontario, blacklegged ticks can also transmit other diseases, including anaplasmosis, babesiosis, and Powassan virus.

As of October 26, 2025, a total of 2,544 cases of Lyme disease have been reported in Ontario. The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit has reported 13 cases to date in 2025. Between 2005 to 2024, the highest number of annual cases reported locally was four.

#### **Ontario Measles Outbreak Declared Over - October 6, 2025**

On October 6, 2025, Public Health Ontario declared Ontario's measles outbreak over, following national guidance to determine its conclusion. As of October 28, 2025, Ontario had reported a total of 2,375 measles cases (2,060 confirmed, 315 probable) associated with the outbreak that started in October 2024 and impacted 26 public health units.

The Health Unit reported 38 measles cases (12 confirmed and 26 probable) over the course of the outbreak. Although the outbreak has concluded, measles continues to circulate in Canada and internationally, highlighting the importance of vaccination, timely case finding, and public health follow-up.

## **Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC Hub)**

The IPAC Hub is assisting Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and other congregate living settings (CLSs) in preparing for the respiratory illness season. Current activities include:

- Conducting IPAC assessment and audits in CLSs
- Assisting with outbreak management planning
- Supporting the development of IPAC programs, policies, and procedures

## *Oral Health*

### **Advancing Strategic Priorities Through Digital Innovation and Planetary Health**

The Oral Health Program has successfully transitioned to digital client intake using iPads. This initiative streamlines data collection, improves accuracy, and enhances the overall efficiency of service delivery.

By eliminating the need for most paper-based forms, this shift reflects our dedication to innovation, sustainability, and continuous improvement in public health programming.

As we continue to scale this approach, we are actively exploring additional opportunities to integrate digital tools that promote both environmental stewardship and client-centered care, ensuring our services remain responsive, equitable, and future-focused.

## *Sexual Health*

Swift progress is being made in realigning our sexual health clinical services. This initiative is both timely and strategic, aligning with broader conversations on how best to serve our targeted and priority populations. The goal is to ensure that services fall within the scope of public health—emphasizing health promotion—and to enhance access for priority groups seeking care related to sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBI) risks or contraception needs for those who do not have a primary care provider.

The Health Unit continues to actively promote GetaKit, a service that provides mail-out HIV self-tests and online requisitions for STBBI testing for eligible individuals. Year to date, more than 350 orders have been placed in the Health Unit region, supporting increased access to testing and early detection among priority populations.

## *Harm Reduction Services*

Launched in June, the Our North Bay Health Box (ONBHB) provides low-barrier, stigma-free access to health and wellness supplies. As of September 30, 2025, 8,721 supplies have been

accessed. This includes 4,218 wellness supplies, 3,115 harm reduction supplies, 851 sexual health items, 362 Naloxone kits, and 175 HIV self-test kits.



Communication was shared with partners, noting that the ONBHB has been out of service since October due to a screen malfunction. Although there is no visible external damage, the issue has affected the machine’s functionality. The Health Unit is working with the supplier to restore service as soon as possible.

### Vaccine Preventable Diseases

#### Seasonal Vaccine Campaign

The Fall COVID-19, influenza (flu), and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) campaigns are well underway across the district. Clinics were available in October for high-risk individuals and throughout November for the general population.

New this year is an expansion of the publicly funded RSV vaccine to include all adults 75 years of age or older. In addition to community clinics, seasonal vaccines are available at our in-house Health Unit clinics in North Bay and Parry Sound. The RSV prevention program is underway, with long-term care and retirement homes providing the vaccine to older individuals. The Health Unit, hospitals, and local primary care providers offer RSV vaccines to pregnant individuals, as well as a preventive treatment to infants, and high-risk children within our district.

#### Grade 7 Vaccine Program

October marked the beginning of the annual grade 7 vaccine program, which includes Hepatitis B (Hep B), Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), and Meningococcal vaccines. This year, Health Unit

staff will visit 21 schools in the fall and spring, reaching over 1,300 students to promote these important vaccines and improve vaccination rates across the district.

Over the past five years, rates of vaccination have declined, particularly for Hep B and HPV vaccines (Immunization Data Tool). While the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit continues to have rates above the provincial average, there remains room for improvement. With plans for a district-wide information and promotional HPV campaign in early 2026, vaccination rates are expected to rise by the end of the school year.

## Community Services

### *Environmental Health*

This year, the Environmental Health team has embarked on several quality improvement initiatives. Over the past year, 43 work instructions were reviewed, consolidated, and eliminated by integrating their content into new procedures. The new procedures improve clarity, confidence, and efficiency across the team.

Environmental Health is participating in a provincial quality improvement initiative, facilitated by Public Health Ontario, involving 21 health units across the province. The initiative focuses on improving food inspection processes. While this is the first phase, the insights gained will serve as a foundation for broader operational improvements.

The province recently replenished its stock of rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, ending the temporary sparing guidelines. These guidelines had minimal operational impact beyond planning and training.

With summer concluded, Environmental Health has completed seasonal programs, including mosquito trapping and beach sampling. Mosquito surveillance was conducted from June to September at 15 urban sites, yielding 10,514 specimens, of which 5,801 were speciated and 1,509 tested for West Nile virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis virus, with no positive pools detected. This surveillance occurs every three years to monitor vector species within the district.

### *Healthy Families*

#### **2025 Virtual Maternal Child Update**

On October 8, the Health Unit hosted a virtual *Maternal Child Update*, drawing approximately 90 healthcare providers from across the district and neighbouring health unit areas. The session focused primarily on breastfeeding best practices, featuring a keynote presentation by Kathy O'Grady, a renowned Registered Nurse and International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant.

In addition to the keynote, the event included two shorter presentations provided by Health Unit staff on congenital syphilis and pediatric nutrition guidelines. Based on evaluation responses received to date, most participants indicated that the session met their learning expectations, was well-organized, and 97% reported they would attend a similar session in the future.

## *Community Health*

### **Community Resilience Learning Movement**

The Adverse Childhood Experiences and Resilience (ACER) Working Group of the Muskoka, Nipissing, and Parry Sound Child and Youth Planning Table, co-chaired by the Health Unit, recently hosted two regional events in North Bay and Huntsville to launch the Community Resilience Learning Movement. Titled *What Shapes Us: A Community Resilience Event*, the gatherings brought together 141 attendees from 51 organizations across sectors.

Dynamic keynote speaker Dr. Jean Clinton, Child Psychiatrist and Knowledge Translator, delivered a compelling presentation, *From Adversity to Resilience: How Relationships and Environments Shape Lifelong Health*. Dr. Zimbalatti provided opening remarks at the gathering in North Bay. These events marked the first collective action of the ACER Working Group to prevent early adversity and promote resilience. The initiative reflects a growing regional commitment to cross-sector collaboration and shared learning to support long-term well-being for children, youth, and families.

### **Vaping**

Concerns have emerged regarding students vaping at school during instructional hours, with many reporting challenges in staying engaged throughout a full class period and a lack of meaningful alternatives to vaping during breaks.

In response, an initiative was developed at a local high school in the Near North District School Board following a student focus group composed of individuals who regularly use the designated vaping and smoking area. Students suggested hard candies as a cessation aid and recommended art supplies and tetherball equipment as engaging alternatives to combat boredom during breaks.

Key stakeholders included the Health Unit (Community Health Promoter), the school principal, the Board safe-school Principal, and high school students. The campaign was launched during a school-wide lunch barbecue, allowing inclusive participation without requiring students to self-identify as vapers. Students were invited to exchange their vaping devices for a lollipop and select a cessation tool or a combination of oral stimulation and fidget items.

The event resulted in the collection of nearly 50 vaping devices and several nicotine pouches. Students expressed enthusiasm and pride in seeing their ideas implemented in a tangible and impactful way.

## Organizational Effectiveness

### *Professional Practice*

During this reporting period, Professional Practice transitioned to the Organizational Effectiveness portfolio as part of the 2024 organizational review. Effective November 3, 2025, this change includes the addition of the Quality Assurance and Communications programs to this portfolio. The Manager, Quality, Practice, and Relations now reports to the Executive Director, Organizational Effectiveness. The adjustment supports broader organizational realignment related to the movement of health promotion capacity to Foundational Services.

This September, the Health Unit welcomed 12 Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) students completing their third-year community health placements from Canadore College and Nipissing University. Eight of these students are contributing to initiatives within the Communicable Disease Control Program, focusing on infection prevention and control. Four students are supporting work under Priority 2, Strategy 4 *“Cultivate our role within systems-level efforts to reduce poverty and homelessness,”* of the Organizational Strategic Plan. In addition, one fourth-year BScN student is completing their final practicum with the Communicable Disease Control Program.

### *Indigenous Engagement*

#### **Northern Food Rx Summit**

Staff from Indigenous Engagement and Development and Community Health attended the Northern Food Rx Summit alongside partners from the North Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre and Wasauksing First Nation. Participants engaged in shared learning and discussions on Indigenous food sovereignty, which recognizes the inherent right of Indigenous People to govern their own food systems in alignment with cultural values, traditional knowledge, and relationships to the land and water.

The summit emphasized collective planning, and relationship building to advance community-led approaches to wellness. Participants prepared and shared a meal of traditional Indigenous foods while gaining knowledge on Indigenous foodways. Supporting Indigenous food sovereignty strengthens reconciliation by recognizing and restoring Indigenous knowledge systems and addressing the colonial disruptions that continue to affect food systems and health outcomes.

Participation at the Summit reflects the Health Unit's commitment to strengthening relationships with Indigenous partners and supporting self-determined approaches to wellness through collaboration and shared learning.

### *Communications*

- Community clinics for COVID-19, flu, and RSV vaccines have been promoted throughout the Health Unit region using both traditional and digital media, supporting strong clinic attendance.
- Updates have been made to the Health Unit website to make it easier for community partners and the public to locate new and existing Health Unit-led data dashboards, with more dashboards anticipated in the future.
- Sub-brand logos representing the Health Unit's programs and services are being updated to reflect current-day paradigms and organizational changes and ensure consistency in graphic design elements.
- Communications are actively capturing photos at Health Unit-led or attended events, improving social media reach and engagement, increasing public awareness of the Health Unit's presence, and highlighting how the organization delivers on its vision, mission, and values. These photos will also serve as an asset for the next public Annual Report and other creative materials.
- Continued support is being provided to the Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer and Environmental Health leads in responding to media and public inquiries about Perfluoroalkylated Substances (PFAS), in preparation for a public forum following a series of investigative articles that included the Health Unit interviews.

### *Foundational Services*

#### **Population Health Assessment & Surveillance**

- A Mental Health Framework dashboard was drafted and shared with internal staff and community partners for feedback prior to its launch.
- Analysis of mortality data in the Health Unit region is underway, including trends over time and across sex, age, geography, and cause of death.

#### **Effective Public Health Practice**

- Programs are developing their Organizational Operational Documents (OODs) to identify 2026 planning priorities, intended outcomes, activities, and related evaluation plans.
- The Health Unit is participating in a regional Quality Improvement Educational Initiative, led by Public Health Ontario and involving multiple northeastern health units.

Participating staff will build capacity in quality improvement methods, leadership, and system thinking to support evidence-informed decision making and service delivery.

### **Strategic Planning**

- An internal staff survey was implemented to collect data for multiple strategy work groups to inform future work plan activities and outcomes.

### **Health Promotion**

- Multiple program-specific health promotion projects are underway. The Health Promotion Planner is supporting projects related to extreme heat and air quality, oral health information for parents, vector-borne diseases (ticks and mosquitoes), and a range of environmental health concerns, including animal bites and scratches, harmful algal blooms, drinking water safety, beach water safety, and seasonal food safety.
- The Health Promotion Planner and the Health Promotion Specialist are drafting a guideline and procedure for engaging people with lived and living experience (e.g., of substance use, mental health, Indigenous) in Health Unit projects/initiatives/strategies. The goal is to provide staff with best practice recommendations for meaningful engagement to strengthen public health work.

### **Health Equity**

- Twenty-nine applications were approved for the 2025 health equity training funds, which support organizations serving priority populations in the district. Funding supports professional development in health equity areas aligned with the Health Unit's 2024-27 Strategic Plan, with training taking place between September and December 2025.
- The internal Health Equity Hive Committee continues to address requests for engagement on opportunities and initiatives impacting health equity. In October and November, sessions were coordinated among client-facing programs to explore collective opportunities for comprehensive health promotion and align programs with equitable service access for populations most impacted by inequities.