

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

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**Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer**

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# Medical Officer of Health Update

## COVID-19 Update

### *General Update*

#### *Declaration of Emergency*

In response to the alarming rise of COVID-19 cases, a declaration of emergency was made on January 12, 2021, for all of Ontario.

The declaration of emergency allows the government to:

- strengthen public health and workplace safety measures
- create and enforce emergency orders

The purpose is to help:

- keep people at home as much as possible to save lives
- stop the spread of COVID-19 in Ontario
- prevent the hospital system from becoming overwhelmed
- protect vulnerable populations and those who care for them

The enhanced public health and workplace safety measures are anticipated to be in place until at least **February 11, 2021**.

The results of these measures will be evaluated throughout the provincial emergency to determine when it is safe to lift any restrictions, or if they need to be extended.

#### *What this means*

The COVID-19 Response Framework (colour-coded zones) is paused.

The province-wide shutdown will continue with stronger public health and workplace safety measures. Everyone must follow the rules (orders) under the [Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act](#) and the [Reopening Ontario Act](#).

#### *Stay at home*

As of January 14, 2021, at 12:01 a.m., a stay-at-home order is in effect for all of Ontario.

This means you must stay at home. You should only go out for necessities, such as:

- getting food, beverages, or medication
- going to medical appointments
- supporting vulnerable community members
- child care

- attending school or a post-secondary institution
- going to a bank
- accessing government services
- getting exercise or walking pets
- going to work, if you can't do it remotely

Businesses must ensure that all employees work from home if they can.

Do not travel outside your region or the province unless absolutely necessary.

### *Section 22 Class Order: Isolation*

On December 24, a Class Order under Section 22 of the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* was issued. The Order enables North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (Health Unit) to enforce self-isolation requirements for the group of individuals whom it applies. This was necessary to ensure that isolation orders were followed in a timely manner, without delay, in an effort to slow the spread of the virus.

### *Additional Restrictions*

In accordance with the provisions of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protections Act*, and the Regulations thereunder, specifically Stay-at-Home Order, and the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act*, and the Regulations thereunder, specifically Rules for Areas in Stage 1, the Medical Officers of Health have the authority to impose further restrictions locally in order to decrease or eliminate the risk to community health presented by COVID -19.

For the following reasons, it was deemed necessary to close all Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs' (OFSC) trails and trails utilizing Crown Land, outdoor public ice rinks, tobogganing hills, and skating trails throughout the district.

- The province is facing a health crisis and we all must do everything possible to reduce the risk of spreading the virus in order to save lives.
- There is community spread of COVID-19 Variant just south of our district. This variant is much more transmissible and spreading quickly. It is a threat to all of us.
- The province is experiencing high daily case numbers, deaths, outbreaks, hospital admissions, intensive care admissions and patients on ventilators
- The modeling predictions of what is to come if we do not act now is dire. Our health care system will be overrun.
- We have limited health care resources in the north, which must be protected.
- January has brought us our highest number of cases in a single month at 55. We are seeing the daily number of people testing positive in our district dropping, which is encouraging and it is important that we keep this number low to help reduce the burden on hospitals and long-term care homes locally.

- It is the law. The stay-at-home order states that every individual shall remain in their place of residence at all times unless leaving their place of residence is necessary. Essential trips only.
- The Health Unit experienced an increase of complaints related to snowmobiling, tobogganing and skating, where people were not following gathering limits, were not physically distancing, were not wearing face coverings. They were not following public health measures.
- Complaints have also been received about people travelling from other districts to use the local snowmobile trails, thus putting our district at increased risk of transmitting COVID-19.
- We have seen community spread, meaning that the individuals do not know where they got COVID-19. Studies have indicated that for every one positive case we know about there are approximately five we do not know about in the community, which increases everyone's risk. You could be spreading the virus and not even know it. This is an important reason for asking everyone to follow public health measures, especially stay-at-home orders.
- The Health Unit will continue to review other outdoor activities within our district and will impose further restrictions if public health measures are being ignored. We all share the responsibility of protecting the health of those within our communities.
- These additional restrictions will be withdrawn when safe to do so. They will not be revoked before the Declaration of Emergency and stay-at-home orders are rescinded.

We do support individual or household physical activity when people are following public health measures, but we must impose restrictions when people are congregating, not following public health measures, or traveling between districts. It puts everyone at risk

### *Variants of Concern*

Viruses constantly change through mutation and variations due to evolution and the adaptation process in order for the virus to survive. The COVID-19 virus is no exception. Since the fall of 2020, three new variants of concern (VOC) have emerged. They are the United Kingdom (UK), South Africa, and the variant from Brazil.

There is growing international evidence of increased transmissibility for all three VOCs. Within Ontario, there is already community spread of the UK variant meaning that individuals who have tested positive for the variant do not know where they got it from (not travel related and no contact with known positive cases).

While it has not been determined with full certainty if the new variants increase the risk of death or increase the risk of vaccine escape, increased transmissibility has been associated with significant strain on affected public health and health care systems. This could result in more cases, more hospitalizations, and more deaths. For these reasons, more than ever before, all public health measures must be adhered to if we are to contain the spread of the circulating variant. Additionally, enhanced case, contact, and outbreak management requirements have been implemented.

Public Health Ontario has an extensive surveillance and testing plan in place with regular communication to public health units regarding those testing positive for the variant. Currently, there are no positive variant cases within our district.

### *Immunization Update*

The Health Unit began immunizing all residents in long-term care homes and First Nations elder care communities throughout our district on Tuesday, January 26, 2021. If the next shipment of vaccine arrives as anticipated, the target date of February 5 to complete all residents as mentioned will be met.

Due to global vaccine shortages, the Ministry of Health (Ministry) is unable to confirm further shipments of vaccines to us beyond the number of vaccines required to immunize all residents of long-term care homes and First Nations elder care communities. Once the Health Unit receives additional doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, and in accordance to the Ministry's ethical framework, priority will be given to:

- staff, essential caregivers (including family caregivers) and other employees in long-term care and First Nations elder care settings;
- residents, staff, essential caregivers (including family caregivers) and other employees in retirement homes and congregate living settings for seniors;
- health care workers, including hospital employees, staff who work or study in hospitals and health care personnel;
- adults in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations;
- adult recipients of chronic home health care.

Please note that the provincial framework does mention high-risk retirement homes. There are no designated high-risk retirement homes in the Health Unit's district.

The Health Unit will continue to update the district on the status of the COVID-19 vaccine as information becomes available, including when the public can call for an appointment booking.

## **Public Health Physician Update – Dr. Carol Zimbalatti**

### **Infection Prevention and Control Hub and Spoke Model**

On December 29, 2020, the Board of Health for the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit was advised by the Ministry of the approval of 100% one-time funding for the period of October 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021. This funding is intended to develop networks to enhance Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) practices in congregate living settings such as long-term care facilities, retirement homes, and congregate care facilities (group homes, shelters).

In Northern Ontario, public health has been chosen to lead the sub-regional IPAC table (or Hub). This role will have an education and training focus, but also involves coordination of Communities of Practice, as well as assessment and auditing. The Ministry is requiring weekly progress reports on the implementation of the Hub and Spoke Model.

Northern medical officers of health are advocating individually and collectively to Ontario Health and the Ministry the need for long-term funding for this project to facilitate planning and the hiring of staff.

The Health Unit's Public Health Physician has been named for this model. Planning meetings are underway, and communications with partners will occur shortly.

*Approved by*

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