

Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health


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Medical Officer of Health Update

Warm weather is here, graduation celebrations are underway, and summer events are beginning to fill the calendar. Summer has arrived in Nipissing and Parry Sound, bringing opportunities to enjoy our region's lakes, parks, trails, and other popular attractions. We are fortunate to call this remarkable area home.

As residents and visitors make the most of the season, the Health Unit has been hard at work helping to ensure a safe and healthy summer for everyone. Seasonal health risks can arise from many sources, including the food we eat, the water we drink and swim in, the wildlife we encounter, and changing environmental conditions.

This report highlights the many ways the Health Unit is working to reduce summer health risks, from ticks and extreme heat to recreational water, food trucks, blastomycosis, animal bites, poor air quality, blue-green algae blooms, legionella, and small drinking water systems.

Wishing everyone a safe, healthy, and enjoyable summer season!

Programs and Services Updates

Corporate Services

Facilities Operations

North Bay

- Garden maintenance contract secured for 2026 season.
- Parking lot sweeping completed.
- Internal public facing signage is being updated to include Anishinaabemowin language.
- One parking space will be designated for Indigenous Elders.
- Staff terrace furniture has been set up for the season.
- Building sprayed with spider deterrent.
- Window washing will occur in May and continue into June.

Parry Sound

- No updates to report.

Information Technology

- Completed transition of Shared Storage requests into the Service Desk ticketing system.
- Began planning for network infrastructure upgrades scheduled to begin next month.
- Replaced and recycled outdated uninterruptible power supply batteries in the second floor communications room in the North Bay office.

Human Resources

Human Resources staff have been attending team meetings to review the new process for reporting occupational health and safety issues, hazards, and incidents. These discussions have helped identify opportunities for additional education regarding internal processes.

Staff participated in Mental Health Week activities from May 4-10, 2026. In recognition of this year's theme, "*Come Together Canada*," Human Resources organized two social events to encourage connection and social well-being among staff. Approximately 40 employees gathered for a shared morning break while another 40 attended a group lunch.

On June 1, 2026, [Dialogue](#) became the new provider for the Employee and Family Assistance Program. Dialogue is a modern, industry-leading provider of employee and family assistance services accredited by [Accreditation Canada](#).

Professional development sessions coordinated through Human Resources included:

- De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations - 8 participants
- Additional De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations are scheduled throughout the spring and summer.

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

- Public Health Inspector, Environmental Health (1.00 FTE), effective April 21, 2026
- Community Development Coordinator, Community Health (1.00 FTE), effective May 1, 2026
- Human Resources Coordinator, Talent Management (1.00 FTE), effective May 19, 2026
- Bilingual Public Health Nurse, Vaccine Preventable Diseases (1.00 FTE), effective May 24, 2026
- Senior Public Health Nurse, Vaccine Preventable Diseases (1.00 FTE), effective May 25, 2026

There has been no net increase in permanent positions.

The next cohort of student placements will begin in September, with placement requests from educational institutions due to the Health Unit by August 1, 2026.

Finance

The Finance Team has submitted the following documents:

- 2025 Annual Report
- 2025 Annual Reconciliation Report

- 2025 Revenue Canada Charity Return
- 2025-2026 Infection Prevention and Control Hub Year-End Report
- 2026-2027 Infection Prevention and Control Hub Budget
- 2025-2026 Stay on Your Feet Year-End Report
- 2025-2026 Planet Youth Year-End Report

The following documents were sent to municipalities:

- 2025 Municipal Financial Information Return
- 2025 North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit Audited Financial Statements

Clinical Services

Communicable Disease Control

Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is transmitted through the bite of an infected blacklegged tick. Most human cases result from exposure to areas where infected ticks are established. Established tick populations are expanding 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.

In 2025, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit recorded 14 Lyme Disease cases. This is the highest number of Lyme Disease cases ever recorded by the health unit, corresponding to an incidence rate of 9.4 cases per 100,000 population.

To prepare for the 2026 season, the Communicable Disease Control (CDC) program partnered with Environmental Health, Community Health, and Communications to develop a health promotion strategy, including a tick-borne diseases public awareness campaign.

As of June 7, 2026, a total of 236 cases of Lyme disease have been reported in Ontario. The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit reported 0 cases to date in 2026.

Handwashing Project 3rd Year Nursing Students

Children are more likely to get infections, especially common colds and stomach illnesses. Teaching children how to wash their hands properly is an important part of keeping them healthy.

Studies have shown that handwashing education in the community:

- Reduces the number of people who get sick with diarrhea by 23-40%
- Reduces diarrheal illness in people with weakened immune systems by 58%
- Reduces respiratory illnesses, like colds, in the general population by 16-21%
- Reduces absenteeism due to gastrointestinal illness in schoolchildren by 29-57%

Source: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) – Handwashing Facts and Statistics](#)

To encourage children to wash their hands, the Communicable Disease Control program partnered with Canadore College 3rd year Nursing students. The nursing students offered handwashing lessons to children in childcare centres in the North Bay Parry Sound area from January 2026 to April 2026. The program was offered in both English and French.

In total, more than 260 children across seven childcare centres learned about germs, how they are spread, and how to protect themselves and others through proper handwashing. When done correctly, handwashing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of illness.

Oral Health

The Oral Health Program continued to strengthen community partnerships and outreach initiatives that support equitable access to oral health services and preventive care. In collaboration with the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board (DNSSAB) and the Clinical Access Mobile Partnership (CAMP) Van, staff provided on-site screenings and client navigation services at DNSSAB's North Bay office to help connect individuals experiencing barriers to care with appropriate supports.

The Oral Health team also collaborated on Human Papillomavirus Virus vaccine (HPV) public education initiatives to increase awareness of HPV vaccine as cancer prevention tool and to support evidence-based health messaging across programs and community partners. In recognition of National Oral Health Month, staff participated in a province-wide campaign with public health units from across Ontario to promote preventive care and highlight the connection between oral health and overall well-being.

Sexual Health

In collaboration with the Communicable Disease Control Program, the Sexual Health and Harm Reduction Services program delivered a CME-accredited educational session to health care practitioners during Grand Rounds at North Bay Regional Health Centre in April. The presentation highlighted regional trends in reportable sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections and provided a refresher on the Mandatory Blood Testing Act, 2006.

We continue to actively promote GetaKit, a service that provides mail-out HIV self-testing and online requisitions for sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing for eligible individuals. To expand access to testing and support earlier detection among priority populations, the provincial age of eligibility for STI testing has been lowered to 16 years of age, while eligibility for HIV self-testing remains at 18 years of age.

Harm Reduction Services

The *Community Safety: That's the Point* campaign was launched in April alongside Earth Day, with the goal of empowering community members to actively contribute to a safer and healthier environment. The campaign focused on building awareness, knowledge, and confidence around the safe collection and proper disposal of community sharps, helping to reduce associated health and safety risks. Activities included posters, instructional videos, social media posts, an updated [sharps webpage](#), and two training sessions offered during both daytime and evening hours. Evaluation of the campaign is currently underway.

The Health Unit issued a Community Drug Alert on April 7, followed by a second extension on May 5 that remained in effect until May 22, in response to an increase in locally reported drug poisonings - levels not seen since September 2020 in Nipissing and Parry Sound districts.

Health Unit staff have been actively sharing alert information with clients through the Harm Reduction Services offices in North Bay and Parry Sound, while providing education and engaging in one-on-one conversations to reduce risk. The alert had also been distributed to community partners through the Ontario Naloxone Program and the Needle Syringe Program to ensure information reaches people who use substances throughout the region.

Since the alert, one new organization, No More Tears West Nipissing, has been onboarded to the Ontario Naloxone Program, expanding naloxone distribution and strengthening overdose prevention efforts throughout the district.

The Nipissing Addictions and Mental Health Systems Table, of which the Health Unit is a member, focused on mapping services related to substance use, including drug and alcohol support through two ecosystem mapping sessions facilitated by the Tamarack Institute. This work will help inform the development and next steps for the new Nipissing District Drug and Alcohol Strategy.

Community partners from a broad range of sectors participated, demonstrating a shared commitment across the four pillars: health promotion, harm reduction, treatment, and community safety. A third Systems Table session, including a broader community engagement component, took place on May 22, 2026.

Vaccine Preventable Diseases

The Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPD) Program recently concluded the provincially funded Grade 7 Hepatitis B (HB), Meningococcal, and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) school immunization program for the 2025/2026 school year.

The number of Grade 7 and 8 students being immunized for optional HB, and HPV vaccines increased significantly compared with the previous year. Increased parental utilization of electronic consent forms, along with the Health Unit's HPV social media campaign, may have contributed to this increase. A formal evaluation of the HPV campaign is underway.

In June, the Vaccine Preventable Diseases team will begin the annual Childcare Assessment process. This initiative involves reviewing immunization records for all children and staff in licensed childcare settings across the district to ensure compliance with provincial immunization requirements.

Community Services

Environmental Health

With the onset of the seasonal operating period, Tobacco Enforcement Officers have commenced test-shopping activities to assess compliance with age-of-sale requirements for tobacco and vaping products. At the same time, Public Health Inspectors are supporting the start-up of seasonal operations across food premises, recreational camps, pools and spas, and small drinking water systems. During the first three weeks of May, inspection activity included 22 requests for new or seasonal food premises, two recreational camp opening notifications, nine pool and spa openings, and 86 small drinking water system start-ups. Inspection and approval processes are being prioritized to support timely openings while maintaining public health protections.

Healthy Families

The Basics Nipissing–Parry Sound Initiative

The Basics Nipissing–Parry Sound is a community-wide initiative that promotes nurturing parent–child relationships and healthy childhood development. The initiative brings together partners from across sectors to build awareness, strengthen capacity, and create supportive environments for families with young children. This work aims to improve equitable access to

early childhood development supports and ensure families receive consistent, practical tools to help children thrive.

A local Basics Coalition, chaired by the health unit, guides local implementation by aligning efforts across organizations, identifying opportunities to integrate The Basics principles into existing services, and fostering a shared commitment to early childhood development. Current members include: [Community Living North Bay](#), [EarlyON Child and Family Centres](#), [District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board](#), [Hands TheFamilyHelpNetwork.ca](#)

The Basics Insights Text Messaging Program

The Basics Insights is a free weekly text messaging program that provides practical, evidence-informed parenting tips to support positive parent–child interactions. In 2025, 201 local families were enrolled in the program. Quarterly evaluation surveys showed strong parent satisfaction, with families reporting increased awareness of The Basics, more conversations about the principles, and greater use of the strategies in daily caregiving routines.

Evaluation findings indicate positive changes in caregiving behaviours across all five Basics Principles: Maximize Love, Manage Stress; Talk, Sing, and Point; Count, Group, and Compare; Explore Through Movement and Play; and Read and Discuss Stories.

Next Steps

Expanding the network of [Basics Partners](#) and supporting organizations to further integrate the Basics principles into their work with families.



Community Health

Northern Public Health Units received one-time funding to expand the [Northern Fruit & Vegetable Program](#) into high schools starting in 2026. The program promotes increased fruit

and vegetable consumption while educating students and families about healthy eating and physical activity. Unique to Northern Ontario, the initiative is funded by the Ministry of Health in partnership with the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association and coordinated by local Public Health Units. From December 2025 to June 2026, 100% of schools across the districts registered, including elementary, secondary, and First Nations schools, where students were offered two servings of fresh fruits and vegetables each week.

STOP on the Net is an online smoking cessation program run by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health that provides adults in Ontario with a free 6-week kit of nicotine replacement therapy including patches, lozenges and/or gum, delivered by mail to their address. In the North Bay Parry Sound District, 396 individuals enrolled in the program during the April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026, reporting period, representing approximately 2.5% of people who smoke locally, compared with 1.6% across Ontario. Of follow-up respondents, 37 of 111 (33.3%) were not smoking at 8 weeks, and 19 of 52 (36.5%) were not smoking at 6 months post-enrollment. The Health Unit supports and promotes STOP on the Net through one-on-one client interactions, by sharing information and resources with community partners, and through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

Emergency Management

Updating of Health Unit's Hazard Identification Risk Assessment (HIRA) is underway along with updates to sub-plans within the Emergency Management Plan.

On May 5th the Health Unit participated in the virtual portion of the Ministry of Health's provincial workshop on Public Health Preparedness and Response to Extreme Environmental Health Events. The event, hosted by Toronto Public Health, was opened by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health, and featured speakers from Public Health Ontario, Ministry of Health, and Environmental and Climate Change Canada. Key messages included: shifting from an event mindset to a seasonal one; investing in monitoring and back-up system; and creating a culture of flexibility and adaption through cross-training of staff.

Organizational Effectiveness

Quality, Practice, and Relations

Quality Assurance

Evaluation of the Quality Assurance system has progressed with the launch of an organizational survey to gather staff feedback on the structure, clarity, and usability of current processes related to policies, procedures, and directives. This follows earlier process mapping work and is intended to strengthen understanding of how the system is experienced in practice. Analysis of survey results is now underway and will inform opportunities to improve consistency and effectiveness across the organization.

The process for managing formal complaints from the public has been updated and integrated into the Quality Issue Reporting (QIR) system. This change implements a more consistent approach to documenting, tracking, and monitoring complaints, while strengthening organizational oversight of trends and follow-up activities. As with other quality issues, formal complaints captured through QIR will continue to inform reporting and support ongoing quality improvement efforts.

Professional Practice

Professional Practice has begun exploratory work to support the introduction of a documentation auditing process across programs with regulated staff, in collaboration with a summer nursing student. Documentation auditing is a recognized best practice that supports consistency, accuracy, and accountability in professional record keeping. Current efforts are focused on building an understanding of documentation practices across program areas, identifying relevant regulatory and professional expectations, and exploring audit criteria that could be applied consistently. This foundational work will inform the development of an approach to support ongoing monitoring and reinforce expectations for quality documentation across the organization.

Professional Practice is also leading work to interpret and apply the College of Nurses of Ontario's Virtual Care Practice Standard within a Public Health context. Particular attention is being given to the inclusion of telephone interactions within the definition of virtual care, reflecting the significant proportion of services delivered through this modality in public health. Existing processes related to assessment, advice, consent, and documentation are being examined to identify where alignment with the updated standard is required. Work is also underway to better understand expectations related to providing care to clients who may be located outside Ontario during virtual interactions, including jurisdictional considerations and implications for nursing practice.

Communications

The Health Unit issued a Community Drug Alert on April 7, 2026. The drug alert process involves collaboration across multiple program areas within the organization. Communications supports this work through the development and dissemination of public service announcements, news releases, social media content, and responses to media inquiries related to issued alerts.

The Health Unit's Annual Report has been released, presenting key activities and outcomes from the previous year. In addition, updates to the Health Unit website are being implemented in response to changes in the service provider's platform, with associated adjustments to structure and content ongoing to ensure continuity and usability for the public.

Communications has also been working with programs and the Health Promotion Planner to roll out public messaging related to seasonal health concerns, including extreme heat, air quality and wildfire smoke, harmful blue-green algae, wild animal bites, blastomycosis, and Lyme disease.

Indigenous Engagement

Five staff representing the Executive Team, Community Health, and Indigenous Engagement attended a two-day land-based Models of Care gathering, "Maamwi Enchi-Gkendaagziyang" ("Where We Learn Together"), hosted by the North Bay Indigenous Hub. The gathering provided opportunities to strengthen relationships, support culturally grounded learning, and

deepen understanding of Indigenous approaches to wellness and traditional medicines, including Two-Eyed Seeing teachings and the value of bringing together Indigenous and Western ways of knowing in respectful and complementary ways.

The first day focused on land-based learning, with participants walking together on the land in North Bay and Nipissing First Nation to identify local plant medicines and receive teachings related to their traditional uses, harvesting protocols, cultural significance, and the importance of tobacco offerings. Participants were provided tobacco for offerings and engaged in the respectful harvesting of medicines following the teachings. Teachings emphasized respectful and sustainable harvesting practices, as well as the importance of reciprocity, connection to the land, and learning through Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The day also included gathering around the fire for a sharing circle to reflect on the day and the teachings received, while preparing tea from some of the medicines harvested during the walk for the following day.

On the second day, plant medicines were processed and teachings were shared relating to how the medicines work within the body, Indigenous approaches to wellness and sustainability, and the importance of sharing traditional knowledge, alongside the collaborative preparation of Mina'gan arthritis salve.

Participation in the gathering supported ongoing relationship building with Indigenous partners and enhanced staff understanding of culturally grounded traditional wellness approaches that continue to inform Indigenous health, cultural safety, and equity-focused initiatives.

Foundational Services

Population Health Assessment & Surveillance

- The internal Infectious Disease Dashboard was launched to relevant internal staff, in partnership with the Communicable Disease Control and Sexual Health & Harm Reduction Services programs. The dashboard includes statistics on diseases of public health significance, including trends over time and among priority populations, to inform program development and evidence-informed decision-making.

- On April 7, following an urgent public safety alert from the North Bay Police Service and a notice from Nipissing First Nation, the Health Unit released a community drug alert confirming 13 overdoses and 3 deaths due to opioids. On April 21 and May 5, the community drug alert was extended due to a continued high number of opioid-related overdoses reported.
- Heat-related syndromic surveillance using emergency department visit data will be monitored throughout May to September for exceedances that are significantly higher than expected.

Strategic Planning

- Priority 2, Strategy 4 (Cultivate our role within systems-level efforts to reduce poverty and homelessness): Planning is underway for a staff meet-and-greet between the Health Unit, the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and DNSSAB (District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board - specifically Ontario Works and Housing Services). The goal of this session is to increase awareness among staff about the programs and services each organization offers to mutual clients connected to social assistance programs. This event will provide the opportunity to share information, strengthen connections, advance our relationships with the ODSP and DNSSAB offices, and improve our responsiveness with clients seeking support in accessing community resources.
- An evaluation survey was disseminated to current and former leads, co-leads, and members of Strategic Plan workgroups to understand how effectively the implementation structure is supporting strategy workgroups in mobilizing their strategies. Questions focused on tools and support, reporting processes, communication, and overall successes and challenges experienced. Results will be used to make improvements to the implementation structure as work continues through the final half of the strategic plan to the end of 2027.

Health Equity

- Supporting the development of a provincial report being led by [Public Health Ontario](#) and the [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#) on food affordability and food insecurity

among families with children, highlighting food insecurity as a contributor to early adversity. This report follows the [recent 2025 report](#) highlighting the inadequacy of social assistance rates in Ontario and the connection between low income and food insecurity. The new report is anticipated to be released in January 2027 and will complement [local reporting](#) on food affordability.