

COVID-19 Update for Partners

December 16, 2021

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Local Issues

Case of the Omicron variant on the rise

- Simcoe Muskoka continues to see higher rates and cases of COVID-19 and the highly contagious Omicron variant is rapidly spreading through the province with cases currently doubling every three days.
- As Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Kieran Moore said at his briefing yesterday, the pattern of transmission leads us to believe that Omicron is already community-wide and that people should assume that if they test positive for COVID-19, it is likely they have the Omicron variant.
- While there is speculation that the symptoms of Omicron may be less severe, we do not know whether this is true. Emerging evidence indicates there is potential for infection even with two doses of COVID-19 vaccine, although there is some speculation that two doses may provide some degree of protection against hospitalization. However, high volumes of cases can still overwhelm hospitals as the number of cases occurring at the same time will place incredible demands on an already over-extended healthcare system.
- In order to protect the limited resources the health unit and hospitals have, we are taking a number of protective measures (outlined below). We are also urging everyone to follow existing public health measures including staying home when feeling ill and getting tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19, maintaining a physical distance of at least 2 metres from those living outside of your household, wearing a mask indoors and outdoors when physical distancing is not possible, covering your cough, and washing your hands regularly.

Vaccination Blitz

- The health unit is moving forward immediately with an ambitious COVID-19 booster dose campaign. We are currently finalizing plans for a Booster Clinic Blitz starting Saturday and through next week and will be adding 18 large Booster Clinics and the capacity to immunize an additional 30,000 people. Appointments

for these clinics, along with our community clinics in January, have been added into the system as of Friday.

- These efforts run in conjunction with the ongoing campaign to provide paediatric doses of the vaccine to children aged five to 11 years.
- Over the coming days many more Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) staff will be redeployed or experience a shift in where they are redeployed to work in various roles and positions across the agency to support our vaccination efforts while maintaining a basic COVID-19 case and contact management, outbreak management, enforcement, phone line, surveillance, and communications response.
- For the time being, the health unit will only have limited capacity to respond to COVID-related calls and emails to its Health Connection line, and programming unrelated to the COVID response will be on hold temporarily.

Booster doses

- Currently, as of today until December 19th, several groups are [eligible](#) for boosters with at least 6 months (a minimum of 168 days after their second dose). As of Monday, December 20th, everyone 18 years of age and older (born in 2003 and earlier) will be eligible to receive their booster dose and the province will be shortening the interval for all booster doses to 3-months (84 days) following an individual's second dose.
- The health unit is providing booster doses at its community clinics by appointment which can be booked through the [COVID-19 Vaccination Portal](#) or by calling the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at [1-833-943-3900](#).
- Other locations offering booster and third doses by appointment include the COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic at 29 Sperling Dr. in Barrie (walk-ins also available Sun to Thurs 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.), the Cottage Country Family Health Team in Gravenhurst and the Algonquin Family Health Team in Huntsville. Additional vaccination options include appointments through the [Couchiching Ontario Health Team Clinic](#), some health care providers and family health teams, [select pharmacies](#), the [GO-VAXX](#) Bus, and some Indigenous-led clinics.

Preparation for revised Letter of Instruction and Section 22 Order

- A new Letter of Instruction (LOI) for all residents, employers, businesses, and organizations in Simcoe Muskoka has been prepared and if enacted will come into effect as of Monday, Dec. 20, 2021. Under the LOI, capacity limits for certain business types, including restaurants/bars, event spaces and indoor sports and recreational fitness facilities (among other settings) will be reinstated to previous regulated levels to 50%.
- A Section 22 Order has been prepared under the Health Protection and Promotion Act and if enacted will come into effect as of Monday, December 20th. The order will require private social gatherings be limited to a maximum of 10 people if held indoors or 25 people outdoors.
- Both will be issued today at 4:00 p.m. unless the Government of Ontario announces province wide restrictions in the interim.

Stricter self-isolation

- Due to the number of active cases in our community, the health unit is not able to get to all cases and contacts, so if you're symptomatic or are told through any other means that you're a case or contact, you need to isolate and get tested for COVID-19.

Vaccination coverage rate reporting

- As of today, analysis and reporting of vaccination coverage rates on [HealthSTATS](#) has changed based on calculation revisions by Public Health Ontario. This change brings our reporting in line with Public Health Ontario and other Ontario Public Health Units.

Previous SMDHU MOH media briefings are posted on the SMDHU [Facebook](#) page and [YouTube](#) channel.

Simcoe Muskoka COVID-19 Data (as of Dec 16, 2021)					
Total Confirmed Cases	Active Cases (% change from previous week)	New cases Dec 5-11 (% change from previous week)	Total deaths (# change from previous week)	Current Hospitalizations (# change from previous week)	Residents 12+ fully vaccinated (Target 90%)
17,077	981 (+38%)	564 (-4%)	284 (+4)	23 (-9)	85%
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There have been 17,077 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Simcoe Muskoka since COVID-19 was first identified in Canada.• Of the 23 people with COVID-19 who are currently hospitalized in Simcoe Muskoka, 5 are in the ICU.• There have been 390 new cases reported to the health unit for the current week. There were 564 new cases reported to the health unit last week (week of December 5th), 4% lower than the 588 cases reported for the week of November 28th.• From October 17 to December 11, the rate of COVID-19 infection among the unvaccinated vaccine-eligible Simcoe Muskoka population is seven times higher than it is for the fully vaccinated population and the rate of COVID-19 hospitalizations is 16 times higher. Please note that due to the smaller number of unvaccinated hospitalized cases, one or two additional hospitalized cases will noticeably change the ratio.• In total 1,001,568 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Simcoe Muskoka, including doses administered by local pharmacies. 480,607 individuals living in Simcoe Muskoka have received at least one dose of vaccine, which represents 80% of the total population.• Currently 84% of the population 5 years and older living in Simcoe Muskoka have had at least one dose of vaccine including 82% of youth 12 to 17 years of age. In addition, 33% of children 5 to 11 years of age have received at least one dose of vaccine.• There are currently 47 active outbreaks (up from 35 last week), including 31 in educational settings. <p>More local data available at: SMDHU COVID-19 HealthSTATS page and COVID-19 Monitoring Dashboard</p>					

Local Media Updates (Since Dec 9, 2021, Partner Update)

- Health unit taking additional actions to prevent further spread of COVID-19 and the Omicron variant ([news release](#))

- SMDHU community clinics providing COVID-19 boosters for eligible individuals 50 plus ([news release](#))
- Gardner says COVID surge could be 'biggest wave' yet and 'very hazardous' ([article](#))
- COVID outbreak declared over in Orillia hospital's primary medical unit ([article](#))
- Ontario delays lifting proof-of-vaccination requirements ([article](#))
- COVID-19 vaccine boosters now available for 50-plus group ([article](#))
- Thousands of rapid antigen tests being sent home this week with local students ([article](#))
- Regular testing for staff, visitors among changes at long-term care homes ([article](#))
- Capacity restrictions coming for Simcoe-Muskoka ([article](#))
- Further restrictions coming to Simcoe Muskoka amid surging COVID-19 cases ([article](#))
- Eight more Simcoe County schools in COVID-19 outbreak: 33 total ([article](#))
- 6 new COVID-19 cases reported for Muskoka, Dec. 15, outbreak at Huntsville school declared over ([article](#))
- COVID-19 Omicron variant has Simcoe Muskoka, bracing for 'the biggest wave' yet ([article](#))
- Thursday's Colts game against Sudbury postponed due to COVID ([article](#))
- Alliston hospital staff prepare for possible influx of COVID-19 patients ([article](#))
- What to know as students bring COVID-19 screening kits home ahead of winter break ([article](#))
- Barrie minor hockey games cancelled amid rising COVID-19 cases ([article](#))
- 27 Simcoe County schools in COVID-19 outbreak ([article](#))
- Innisfil council adopts COVID-19 vaccination policy ([article](#))
- Parents contemplate pulling kids from school this week to avoid possibility of quarantining over holidays ([article](#))
- Stricter capacity measures likely coming 'very, very soon' ([article](#))
- How is the school board handling rising COVID-19 cases in Muskoka schools? ([article](#))
- COVID-19 outbreak declared at Orillia's Lighthouse shelter ([article](#))
- More than 10,000 kids receive vaccine in first two weeks of roll-out ([article](#))
- 'Time will tell': Simcoe Muskoka's top doc weighs in on whether in-person school will resume in January ([article](#))
- Four more Simcoe County schools declare COVID-19 outbreak: 25 schools in outbreak ([article](#))
- Surging COVID cases could prompt further restrictions: Gardner ([article](#))
- Health unit struggling to keep up as local COVID rates hover above provincial average ([article](#))

Provincial, National and Global COVID-19 Data					
Ontario (As of Dec 16, 2021)					
Total Cases	Active Cases (% change from previous week)	New cases Dec 10 - 16 (% change from previous week)	Total deaths (change from previous week)	Current Hospitalizations (change from previous week)	Residents 12+ fully vaccinated* (Target 90%)
639,341	14,065 (+62%)	11,730 (+59%)	10,102 (+48)	328 (+19)	88%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas with the highest rate of active cases per 100,000 population are: Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington (460) Algoma (317) Sudbury and District (278), Windsor-Essex (250), Chatham-Kent (241). 					

For more national data, see [Ontario COVID-19 case data](#), [Public Health Ontario Data Tool](#), [daily](#) and [weekly](#) epidemiologic summaries

Canada (as of Dec 16, 2021)				
Total Cases (includes confirmed and probable cases)	Active Cases (% change from previous week)	New Cases in the last 7 days (% change from previous week)	Total Deaths (change from previous week)	Population 12+ fully vaccinated
1,857,999	43,909 (+40%)	35,000 (+45%)	30,012 (+136)	86%

Weekly case highlights for November 28 – December 4 2021:

- Daily rates of cases per 100 000 population have begun to increase across all age groups since early November 2021. Among both males and females, case rates continue to be the highest among individuals aged 5-11 years and lowest among individuals aged 60 years and older.
- Outbreaks have been a significant source of COVID-19 spread in Canada and point to vulnerabilities in closed and crowded settings. Notably, in schools and childcare centres, at the start of the school year (September 2021), there was a spike in the number of outbreaks, followed by a decrease early October 2021. Since then, outbreaks in this setting remained relatively stable, followed by an increasing trend observed since early-November 2021.

For more national data, see: [COVID-19 daily epidemiology update](#), [Canada COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiology Report](#)

Global (as of 17:51 pm CET, Dec 16 2021)		
Total confirmed cases	New Cases Dec 6-Dec 12 (% change from previous week)	Total Deaths (Change from previous week)
271,376,643	4,272,651 (+2%)	5,324,969 (+1%)

Weekly highlights for Dec 6-12:

- The African Region reported the largest increase in new cases last week (111%) followed by the Western Pacific Region which reported an increase of 7%. The Region of the Americas and South-East Asia Region both reported decreases of 10% and the European Region reported a 7% decrease.
- In the last week the highest number of cases were reported in: United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Russia.

For more international data, see: [WHO COVID-19 Disease Dashboard](#) and [WHO weekly epidemiological and Operational Updates](#)

Provincial, National and Global Updates (since Dec 9, 2021, Partner Update)

Provincial Updates

Ontario Government:

- Ontario Launching Holiday Pop-Up Testing Blitz ([news release](#))
- All Ontarians 18+ Eligible for COVID-19 Booster Appointments at Three-Month Interval ([news release](#))
- Ontario Calls For Continued Partnership Against the Pandemic And Further Supports For Economic Stability, Recovery And Growth ([news release](#))
- Ontario Taking Further Action to Protect Long-Term Care and Retirement Homes ([news release](#))
- Ontario Taking Action to Protect Against Omicron Variant ([news release](#))

- Ontario Investing in Protections for Residents and Staff in Congregate Care Settings ([news release](#))

Public Health Ontario recently updated the following reports:

- Updated: Interim IPAC Recommendations for Use of Personal Protective Equipment for Care of Individuals with Suspect or Confirmed COVID-19 ([technical brief](#))
- COVID-19 Variant of Concern Omicron (B.1.1.529): Risk Assessment, December 7, 2021 ([evidence brief](#))

National Updates

Government of Canada:

- Remarks from the Chief Public Health Officer on December 13, 2021 ([speech](#))
- Statement from the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada on December 10, 2021 ([statement](#))
- COVID-19 - Global travel advisory ([link](#))

SMDHU Resources

Recent changes to the SMDHU [website](#):

COVID-19 Main Page

- Important Update: Omicron ([link](#))

COVID-19 Vaccinations

- Updated eligibility for booster doses ([link](#))

Going to School

- Families ([link](#))
 - Rapid antigen screening kits ([link](#))
- School administrators and educators
 - Rapid antigen screening kits ([link](#))

HealthSTATS:

- SMDHU [COVID-19 HealthSTATS page](#)

SMDHU Health Connection:

- **We are experiencing a higher call volume, our response times are longer than usual. Please view our COVID-19 pages for up-to-date information. If you have a health concern, call your health care provider or Telehealth 1-866-797-0000.**
- SMDHU Health Connection responds to calls and emails about COVID-19. Contact Health Connection at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 ext. 5829 or via [email](#), Monday-Friday - 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Credible Sources of Information

- [Ontario Ministry of Health](#)
- [Public Health Ontario](#)
- [Centre for Effective Practice COVID-19 Resource Centre](#)
- [Government of Canada](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)