

COVID-19 Update for Partners

December 23, 2021

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Local Issues

Additional Provincial public health measures implemented

- As the highly transmissible Omicron variant takes hold as the dominant strain in Ontario and as transmission rates and cases of COVID-19 continue to rise locally, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) commends the province for making the difficult decision to implement [further restrictions](#) to help avoid the anticipated surge of COVID-19 transmission and its potentially severe health outcomes.
- At 12:01 a.m. on Sunday, December 19, 2021, additional public health measures went into effect to help limit close contacts and curb transmission in higher-risk indoor public settings where masks cannot always be worn. This includes many settings where proof of vaccination is required. Measures include 50 per cent capacity limits in gyms, restaurants, bars, concert venues, shopping malls and movie theatres.
- Social gathering limits are reduced to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors.
- The emergence and rapid growth of Omicron means that we can no longer rely on two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, however, three doses appear to offer better protection against this new variant.
- To slow the spread of COVID-19, on Monday, December 20, 2021, the province also increased COVID-19 booster dose eligibility to include individuals aged 18 years and older with a shortened interval between second dose and booster of at least three months (84 days).

One million doses administered and anniversary of 1st COVID-19 vaccine dose given

- Late last week, December 17, 2021, we surpassed 1 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine administered in Simcoe Muskoka. This was achieved through the hard work at our community vaccination clinics, pharmacies, the GO-VAXX bus, the Red Cross, hospitals, and primary health care providers.
- In addition, December 22, 2021 marks the one-year anniversary of the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine being administered at the 29 Sperling clinic.
- Collectively we have administered more than 1,061,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine and prevented thousands of people from getting sick, and ultimately prevented many additional cases that may have resulted in death.
- The vaccination roll-out has been a community effort and could not have been accomplished without our partners, including the City of Barrie and Royal Victoria Hospital.

Health unit prioritizes vaccination

- Following the province's announcement to rapidly expand [booster eligibility](#), the health unit is experiencing an overwhelming demand for booster shot appointments.
- Locally, there are now about 300,000 people eligible to receive booster doses. The health unit is doing all we can to expedite booster delivery, but we simply do not have the capacity to provide boosters to everyone right away, therefore we continue to prioritize those most at risk of severe disease.
- Effective Monday, December 27 we will be adjusting our approach for seeing clients at all community clinics:
 - We will continue to prioritize those who are most at risk with [walk-in appointments](#) (as we are able) for the following groups (at least 3 months (84 days) from their second dose):
 - Those aged 50+
 - Healthcare workers
 - Indigenous people and their non-Indigenous household members
 - Anyone who received 2 doses of AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson for the initial vaccine
 - Anyone 18+, who received their second dose at least 3 months (84 days) ago and have booked an appointment through the [provincial booking portal](#) will be vaccinated.

Testing capacity as well as case and contact management messaging

- Due to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant of concern and forecasted very high rates of transmission to come, many people may soon be unable to access testing. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 and are unable to access PCR testing, self-isolate for 10 days from the onset of symptoms.
- Those who are able to obtain a PCR test and receive a positive result may not receive timely follow-up from the health unit or from the provincial work force that assists us with case and contact management.
- It is therefore essential that the public understands what they need to do in the absence of direct public health follow up. Information is changing rapidly and therefore we encourage the public to check for the most up-to-date information on our [webpage](#).

Vaccinated versus unvaccinated cases

- Given that most of the population is now vaccinated with 2 doses, breakthrough infections are going to be higher because more people are vaccinated than previously. While the vaccines are very effective, they are not 100% effective.
- There is speculation that the symptoms of the Omicron variant may be less severe, we do not know if 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 overextended healthcare system.
- While more positive cases are in vaccinated people, it is important to note that those in hospital and particularly the ICU largely represent an unvaccinated population. While the vaccine may not be as effective at preventing infection, it is very effective at preventing severe disease and ultimately death. However, we need to see if this continues with Omicron.
- The emergence and rapid growth of the Omicron variant means that we can no longer rely on only two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. UK real-world surveillance data suggests a significant reduction in vaccine effectiveness (VE) against symptomatic infection for Omicron:
 - 2 doses of Pfizer vaccine: VE ~35% after 14 weeks

- 3rd dose of Pfizer vaccine: increase VE to ~75% in the 1st month
- Therefore, people should continue to get vaccinated to help prevent severe disease. Those who are vaccinated still need to practice public health measures to prevent transmission and if eligible are encouraged to receive their booster.

HealthSTATS update

- Analysis and reporting of vaccination coverage rates on HealthSTATS has changed to align with Public Health Ontario's calculations:
 - Age at vaccination is now based on the date the individual receives the vaccine shot.
 - Clients that are now deceased have been removed from the calculations.
- These changes will help provide more current vaccination coverage rates.
- The most noticeable impact is on the 12-17-year-old age group (with their coverage rate dropping by 4%)
- Data describing the number of doses administered are not impacted by this change.
- Major changes to case and contact management starting on December 18, 2021, will have an impact on HealthSTATS COVID-19 reporting as there will be less information collected about demographics, geography, acquisition of confirmed COVID-19 cases, and information about case severity (e.g., hospitalization) may now be delayed. Newly reported cases may not contain complete information.
- A disclaimer has been added to the COVID-19 landing page on [HealthSTATS](#) and to the [COVID-19 Case Explorer](#)

Safe holiday messaging

- This is a time when people want to gather and celebrate together. However, it is important to remember that simply knowing someone does not reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19, therefore we encourage virtual gatherings or events, as they are still the safest way to celebrate.
- If attending an organized outdoor event, please remember that while it is likely safer than an indoor event, the risk of COVID-19 spread still exists. This is why it is important to follow the newly reduced capacity limit of 10 persons indoors and 25 persons outdoors.
- If you choose to host or attend an in-person gathering or event, the fewer people in attendance the better. Regardless of the gathering size, it is still essential to continue taking precautions to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, such as physical distancing and wearing a mask when indoors with people who are not part of your household.
- A mask should be a well-fitted medical mask or a high-quality 3-layer cloth mask that fits properly, covering your nose, mouth and chin with no gaps to ensure that it effectively filters the air.
- Furthermore, the health unit recommends that:
 - Individuals who are **NOT** fully vaccinated* against COVID-19 keep gatherings to only those within their immediate household unless physical distancing is practiced and/or masks are worn.
 - Individuals who **ARE** fully vaccinated are advised to keep gatherings to a small number of people from outside of their household. For the protection of all, preferably everyone should be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.
- If you are hosting or attending a holiday gathering:
 - Ask guests to NOT attend if they have COVID-19 symptoms, even if they are mild.
 - Make a list of guests attending (including their phone number) in case public health needs it for contact tracing.
 - Clean and disinfect all high-touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs).

- Provide all the necessary supplies for your guests, including hand sanitizer, liquid soap and water.
- Open windows, if possible.
- If you are serving food and drinks, wash your hands often while preparing and serving food and suggest all those gathered to do so, before and after eating.
- If you are attending a gathering or staying overnight:
 - Ensure hand sanitizer, liquid soap and water are available, and ensure you wash your hands often.
 - Stay home if you are ill, even if your symptoms are mild.
 - If you are immunocompromised or at a higher risk of severe disease and/or exposure to COVID-19, consider joining virtually or not attending the event.
 - Avoid singing or shouting, especially indoors.
 - Individuals from multiple households who are not fully vaccinated should always practise physical distancing (at least 2 metres or 6 feet) and wear masks.
 - Hosts and guests from multiple households who are unvaccinated, partially vaccinated or their status is unknown, should not sleep in the same bedroom and use separate washrooms, if possible.
 - Monitor for COVID-19 symptoms (hosts and guests) and have a plan for what to do if someone becomes ill, even with mild symptoms.
- Whatever your plans are this holiday season, SMDHU reminds everyone to follow [current public health](#) measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 including limiting your social contacts, staying home when feeling ill, avoiding crowds and maintaining a physical distance of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from anyone outside your household, and wearing a 3 layer mask that covers your nose, mouth and chin indoors and outdoors when physical distancing is difficult or not possible.

**An individual is considered fully vaccinated if they have received:*

- A full series of a COVID-19 vaccine authorized by Health Canada, or any combination of such vaccines and they received their final dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at least 14 days ago; or
- One or two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada, followed by one dose of a COVID-19 mRNA vaccine authorized by Health Canada and they received their final dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at least 14 days ago; or
- Three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine not authorized by Health Canada and they received their final dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at least 14 days ago.

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

Simcoe Muskoka COVID-19 Data (as of Dec 23, 2021)

Total Confirmed Cases	Active Cases <small>(% change from previous week)</small>	New cases Dec 12-18 <small>(% change from previous week)</small>	Total deaths <small>(# change from previous week)</small>	Current Hospitalizations <small>(# change from previous week)</small>	Residents 12+ fully vaccinated <small>(Target 90%)</small>
18,156	1,647 <small>(+68%)</small>	852 <small>(51%)</small>	286 <small>(+2)</small>	30 <small>(+7)</small>	85%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the 30 people with COVID-19 who are currently hospitalized in Simcoe Muskoka, 9 are in the ICU. • There have been 618 new cases reported to the health unit for the current week. There were 852 new cases reported to the health unit last week (week of December 12th), 51% higher than the 564 cases reported for the week of December 5th. • There have been six COVID-19 related deaths reported so far in December. • Most COVID-19 cases in Simcoe Muskoka are from the Barrie and South Simcoe areas. Click here to view the epidemic curve by municipality. 					

- There are currently 49 active outbreaks (up from 47 last week), including 40 in educational settings.

More local data available at: [SMDHU COVID-19 HealthSTATS page](#) and [COVID-19 Monitoring Dashboard](#)

Local Media Updates (Since Dec 16, 2021, Partner Update)

- Tough days ahead as omicron dodges vaccines and public health capacity stretched thin ([article](#))
- RVH not seeing a rise in COVID-19 cases despite Omicron's surge ([article](#))
- One year later, health unit marks 1 million doses of COVID vaccine ([article](#))
- Stevenson Memorial Hospital limits visitors due to COVID-19 ([article](#))
- Simcoe Muskoka health unit's ability to track data, test for COVID-19 'pushed to the limit': Gardner ([article](#))
- COVID-19 cases reported in Simcoe County daycares ([article](#))
- Barrie Chamber runs out of rapid COVID-19 tests ([article](#))
- School board reports COVID-19 case in student at Severn Bridge's KP Manson Public School
- Barrie Curling Club shuts down temporarily after 36 members contract COVID-19 ([article](#))
- Proof of vaccination a real dog's breakfast: Barrie man ([article](#))
- It's vital to plan ahead this holiday season, RVH urges ([article](#))
- Huntsville High School student tests positive for COVID-19 ([article](#))
- Outbreak ends at Bracebridge's Monsignor Michael O'Leary School ([article](#))
- Reports of COVID cancelling South Muskoka Shield game ([article](#))
- Health unit reports a 6th COVID-19 case in connection with Hospice Huntsville outbreak ([article](#))
- Two test positive for COVID-19 at Orillia's Trillium Manor ([article](#))
- 'Overwhelming demand' means Simcoe Muskoka health unit limits booster walk-in appointments ([article](#))
- Think you have COVID-19 during the Omicron wave? Here's what to do ([article](#))
- 'We'll wait and see': City of Barrie still proceeding with full slate of New Year's Eve celebrations — for now ([article](#))
- Capacity limits return today. Here's what you need to know ([article](#))
- Ramara closing all township facilities over Omicron concerns ([article](#))

Provincial, National and Global COVID-19 Data

Ontario <small>(As of Dec 23, 2021)</small>					
Total Cases	Active Cases <small>(% change from previous week)</small>	New cases Dec 10 - 16 <small>(% change from previous week)</small>	Total deaths <small>(change from previous week)</small>	Current Hospitalizations <small>(change from previous week)</small>	Residents 12+ fully vaccinated* <small>(Target 90%)</small>
667,353	32,412 <small>(+130%)</small>	28,012 <small>(+139%)</small>	10,140 <small>(+38)</small>	440 <small>(+112)</small>	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 (648), Halton (309), Toronto (276) Hastings and Prince Edward Counties (258) Middlesex-London (241) <p>For more national data, see Ontario COVID-19 case data, Public Health Ontario Data Tool, daily and weekly epidemiologic summaries.</p>					

Canada (as of Dec 23, 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
1,945,754	101,197 (+130%)	87,227 (+150%)	30,131 (+118)	87%
Weekly case highlights for December 12-18, 2021: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Nine jurisdictions reported an increase in weekly cases (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Northwest Territories) and one jurisdiction reported relatively similar number of weekly cases (Yukon) compared to the previous week. Two jurisdictions (Saskatchewan and Nunavut) reported a decrease in the number of weekly cases compared to the previous week.				
For more national data, see: COVID-19 daily epidemiology update , Canada COVID-19 Weekly Epidemiology Report				
Global (as of 19:06 pm CET, Dec 23 2021)				
Total confirmed cases	New Cases Dec 13 -Dec 19 (% change from previous week)	Total Deaths (change from previous week)		
276,436,619	4,481,026 (+5%)	5,374,744 (+49,775)		
Weekly highlights for December 13-19: <ul style="list-style-type: none">The African Region continued to report the largest increase in new cases in the last week (53%), followed by the Western Pacific Region, which reported an increase of 12%.The South-East Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean regions both reported decreases of 12% and the Region of the Americas reported a 10% decrease.The number of new weekly cases reported by the European Region was similar to the numbers reported in the previous week.The African Region was the only region to report an increase in the number of new weekly deaths (15%).In the last week the highest number of cases were reported in: United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany and Spain.				
For more international data, see: WHO COVID-19 Disease Dashboard and WHO weekly epidemiological and Operational Updates				

Provincial, National and Global Updates (since Dec 16, 2021, Partner Update)

Provincial Updates

Ontario Government:

- Ontario Opens New Mass Vaccination Clinic in Peel Region ([news release](#))
- Ontario Extending Call to Arms to Businesses, Volunteers and Retired Health Professionals ([news release](#))
- Ontario Launches New Supports for Businesses ([news release](#))
- Ontario Investing in More Supports for Retirement Homes ([news release](#))
- Ontario Further Strengthening Response to Omicron ([news release](#))

Public Health Ontario recently updated the following reports:

- COVID-19 Variant of Concern Omicron (B.1.1.529): Risk Assessment, December 13, 2021 ([evidence brief](#))

- SARS-CoV-2 Whole Genome Sequencing in Ontario, December 14, 2021 ([weekly epidemiological summary](#))

National Updates

Government of Canada:

- Remarks from the Chief Public Health Officer on December 22, 2021 ([speech](#))
- Government Temporarily Expands Access to Lockdown Program and Worker Lockdown Benefit ([news release](#))
- COVID-19 Recovery Programs continue to provide support to Canadian businesses and organizations ([news release](#))
- Government of Canada receives additional pediatric vaccine doses ([news release](#))
- Legislation to provide ten days of paid sick leave and enhance protections for health care workers receives Royal Assent ([news release](#))
- Statement from the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada on December 17, 2021 ([news release](#))
- Government of Canada proposing to provide one-time payment to support low-income seniors who received pandemic benefits ([news release](#))
- President of the Treasury Board statement further to the evolving public health situation and the COVID-19 Omicron variant ([news release](#))

SMDHU Resources

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

COVID-19 Main Page

- My COVID-19 test was positive, now what? ([link](#))
- I tested positive for COVID-19 now what? ([fact sheet](#))
- I am a close contact of a person inside my household ([link](#))
- I am a close contact of a person outside my household ([link](#))
- I am a close contact of a person with COVID-19 and I work/attend a high-risk setting ([link](#))
- I am a household member of a close contact ([link](#))
- I am a close contact of a person who tested positive for COVID-19 ([fact sheet](#))
- Rapid antigen tests ([link](#))

Stop the Spread

- Gatherings, events and celebrating holidays ([link](#))
- COVID-19 Checklist for Planning a Wedding ([link](#))
- Wearing a face covering in all indoor public spaces ([link](#))

COVID-19 Vaccinations

- Book your vaccination ([link](#))
- Third doses and boosters ([link](#))

Going to School

- Families ([link](#))
 - Someone in our school community has tested positive for COVID-19 ([link](#))
 - My child is a close contact ([link](#))
 - Instructions for household members ([link](#))
 - COVID-19 Student and family holiday safety ([ENG](#)) ([FR](#))
 - Someone at a School or Child Care Centre Tested Positive for COVID-19 ([FAQ](#))
 - My Child has Been Identified as a Close Contact of Someone Confirmed to Have COVID-19 ([FAQ](#))
- School administrators and educators
 - Guidance documents ([link](#))

- Staff or student is a close contact with someone with COVID-19 ([link](#))

Operating your Business Safely and Partners and Municipalities

- Medical Officer of Health Letter of Instruction and Correspondence ([link](#))
- COVID-19 Proof of Vaccination Requirement ([link](#))
- Workplace Holiday Celebration ([link](#))
- Mandatory face masks in indoor public spaces ([link](#))

Guidance documents:

- Workplace Safety Plan, Screening & Proof of Vaccination ([link](#))
- FAQ - Wearing masks or face coverings within enclosed public spaces ([link](#))
- Food Premises ([link](#))
- Organized public events and gatherings ([link](#))
- Recreational Water Facilities ([link](#))
- Farmers' Markets ([link](#))
- Food Banks and Donations Centres ([link](#))
- Faith-Based Organizations ([link](#))
- Retail businesses and shopping malls ([link](#))
- Outdoor Recreational Amenities ([link](#))
- Facilities for Sports and Recreational Fitness Activities ([link](#))

Locations of COVID-19 PCR testing and assessment centres

- Alliston ([link](#))
- Barrie ([link](#))
- Collingwood ([link](#))
- Huntsville ([link](#))
- Midland ([link](#))
- Orillia ([link](#))
- Wasaga Beach ([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 webpages](#) for up-to-date information. If you have a health concern call your health care provider or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.
- Call us at 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520. Monday through Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or send an email to Health Connection using our [online form](#). Please note that at this time our response times are impacted by the demands of the COVID -19 pandemic and our response times are longer than usual. Please only submit your inquiry once.

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](#)