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Respiratory Season Update # 1

Attention: Physicians, Hospital, Infection Control Practitioner, Walk-In urgent Care Clinic, Nurse Practitioner, Health Unit – Neighboring, Ontario Health, Hospital Occupational Health, EMS, Midwives, Community Health Centre, Family Health Team, Indigenous Healthcare & Community, Long Term Care, Retirement Home, Hospice, Congregate Care, Ontario Health Central

Date: September 22, 2023

As of September 22, 2023, three laboratory-confirmed influenza cases and one influenza outbreak have been reported to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) for the 2023-2024 season meaning, the influenza season has not started in earnest. We expect to see an increase in cases in late October/early November. The percent positivity for our region remains low at 0% and the province at 0.2%.

As of September 16, 2023, 19 of 34 health units have reported at least one case of influenza for the season. SMDHU will continue to analyze surveillance data and provide updates as necessary.

As public health units prepare for the Fall/Winter 2023-24 respiratory season, SMDHU has undertaken planning to support the health system's readiness to respond to seasonal surges of respiratory viruses. Please review the recent [Public Health Alerts](#) related to SMDHU's vaccination campaigns this fall.

COVID-19 Community Risk Level Tool

The COVID-19 Community Risk Level tool was relaunched on Thursday, September 21, 2023 and can be found [here](#) on the SMDHU website. The information will be updated on a weekly basis using a variety of indicators to help residents gauge personal and situational risk within the County of Simcoe and the District of Muskoka.

Weekly Respiratory Virus Update

The Weekly Respiratory Virus Update will restart for the season on September 27th, 2023 and will be produced weekly until April 2024. The report shares the most recent week's local influenza and COVID-19 activity throughout the respiratory season, providing an overview of circulating respiratory viruses.

The weekly update can be found on the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit website [here](#).



If you would like to be added to the weekly electronic distribution list for the Weekly Respiratory Virus Update and receive the update in your inbox, please register [here](#).

Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) Kits Availability

To support ongoing access to COVID-19 testing and therapeutics through the Fall/Winter respiratory season, starting September 18, 2023, **the ministry is inviting health care providers to order and provide RATs to their patients and employees free of charge**. Health care providers do not need to screen patients for eligibility. Ordering pathways for health care providers will continue to be through the [PPE Supply Portal](#). For assistance with creating or accessing an account, or for questions about orders and shipment, contact sco.supplies@ontario.ca.

Health care providers who are not currently enrolled in the Provincial Antigen Screening Program (PASP) and who would like to distribute RAT's to their employees and/or patients, may enroll at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/provincial-antigen-screening-program>.

RAT kits are also available to the public for free at SMDHU. Test kits can be picked up at all [health unit offices](#) (excluding the Barrie clinic at 80 Bradford Street) during regular business hours.

PCR/Molecular Testing Locations

There are still various locations where PCR/molecular testing may be done for those who are eligible. [The Ontario website](#) provides both eligibility and location information.

COVID-19 Treatment

For guidance on COVID-19 treatment such as Paxlovid™ and remdesivir, go to [Ontario Health's website](#). A positive rapid antigen test (RAT) is sufficient as the lab component of the diagnosis. Please consider pre-discussing/informing your patients who would benefit from treatment and providing a prescription in advance of them being infected and testing positive for COVID-19. This would decrease the delay for patients to start on treatment, particularly given Paxlovid™ should be started within 5 days of symptom onset.