



NEWS

Rise in COVID case numbers would put Kawartha, Northumberland in red zone if area not already shut down

Medical officer of health Dr. Natalie Bocking concerned about significant jump in positive cases involving those under the age of 20

By [Catherine Whitnall](#) Kawartha Lakes This Week

Thursday, April 15, 2021

Daily COVID-19 and variants of concern case numbers reported by the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit are much lower than other communities, but still disturbing when placed in context.

As of April 14, the health unit was reporting a total of 1,412 positive cases since the

start of the pandemic with 180 active cases; 10 in Haliburton, 46 in Kawartha Lakes and 124 for Northumberland. The numbers may seem low, but when the 400 to 500 high-risk contacts that “come with these cases” are added in, it’s a cause for concern.

“Our most recent transmission rate is 90 per 100,000 residents,” said medical officer of health Dr. Natalie Bocking during Thursday’s (April 15) board of health meeting. She added this is double from what the health unit saw in early April.

“If we were not already in shutdown, we would be in the red zone.”

When it comes to testing, the positive rate sits at 2.6 per cent, which is a significant increase over the previous week.

Of further concern, continued Dr. Bocking, is the high incidence of new cases over the last two weeks in the under 20 age bracket; 76 per cent of which is from Northumberland. She clarified that, while there has been an increase in school-age cases, the vast majority involve community, not school, transmission. Successful vaccination programs at long-term care and retirement homes has resulted in reduced cases in that demographic; previously those 65 and older made up the greatest percentage of COVID-19 cases.

However, the increased numbers in younger age groups is “a dangerous indicator of transmission,” said Dr. Bocking.

Dr. Bocking noted the rise in new cases, accompanied by the continued rollout of mass vaccination clinics, has stretched the health unit’s resources “quite thin.”

“We have had to make changes to our practices to prioritize the work that needs to be done right now,” said Dr. Bocking, noting public health units across the province are in similar boats.

“I do think we are at a critical point in the pandemic and I don’t want to sound like a broken record, but what we do now to reduce the spread is crucial . . . What’s different now is that we are using resources to vaccinate residents while also dealing with cases, calling contacts and testing.”

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The health unit recently began receiving some support from the Ontario Ministry of Health's Provincial Work Force to do followup with local COVID-19 cases and contacts. Approximately 40 per cent of eligible cases will be assigned to the Force going forward.

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