



## NEWS

# Medical officer of health talks rising COVID-19 cases, community transmission in HKPR

‘The majority of cases that we’re still seeing are kind of average community transmission’

By [Sarah Hyatt](#) Northumberland News

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It’s mostly “average community transmission” driving recent COVID-19 cases, says the local medical officer of health.

In recent weeks, [COVID-19 cases](#) have been climbing in the [Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit’s](#) area, with the largest spikes in Northumberland

(some 270 cases between April 1 and 21.)

“In the last 14 days, we’ve been notified of 291 new cases,” said Dr. Natalie Bocking Wednesday, April 21.

This is for all of HKPR, which includes Northumberland, Kawartha and Haliburton. This represents a “fairly significant increase” in comparison to earlier numbers.

“The majority of cases that we’re still seeing are kind of average community transmission – so not necessarily connected to a specific workplace or setting,” said Bocking. “And quite a number still that can’t identify what the transmission source was, which is just a general indicator of broader community transmission.”

“I think at this point, unlike some other areas that can very clearly say that it’s this population the most that’s been affected, in our region, that’s not the case. It’s still quite I would say... distributed kind of throughout the population demographics.”

Higher case numbers, however, are being recorded among younger age groups recently.

Of the cases identified the last two weeks, 30 per cent are in the under 20 age category, said Bocking, though noted this could mean a few things.

Before, the majority of cases were among the older population. But, vaccines have started for that demographic. Then there’s also the variants of concern (VOCs), which have been reported to cause infection in younger populations – not necessarily children – but the overall younger population, explained Bocking.

As of Wednesday, HKPR’s cumulative case count to date was 1,534. Public health has been managing some seven-eight ongoing outbreaks at a time recently (but not as many in long-term care/retirement home settings).

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Though these outbreaks haven't been major case drivers the last 14 days (accounting for 16 per cent or so of recent cases.) Recently, the most cases are recorded under household contacts (33 per cent), close contacts (25 per cent) and under the unknown category (21 per cent).

The VOCs total to date was 251 Wednesday.

"Of the cases we've been notified of, in the last two weeks, approximately 13-14 per cent of those have been found to be the variants of concern..."

In other words, locally, the variant activity isn't as high as seen elsewhere in Ontario. Across the province, the VOCs seem to have plateaued at around 69 per cent of new cases, noted Bocking.

"We are not seeing in our region the same proportion of variants of concern, but we are seeing it."

It is anticipated that these numbers will change. There is also a delay in reporting from the laboratory if a sample has the mutations found in VOCs, noted Bocking.

Initially, labs are screening for the mutations of interest found among the variants, but then to find out which variant it is, they have to sequence the entire virus, and that can take one-to-two weeks, explained Bocking.

"Plus, they're not doing it on every sample due to capacity issues at the lab. We do know that the majority of variants that have been identified in our region have been the U.K. variant, and if we are seeing any changes with that, then we'll be sharing that info if it becomes (available) or when it becomes available."

The crude rate the last week or so (cases per 100,000 residents) has ranged between 65 to 88/89. Meanwhile, the test positivity rate has also increased and has been hovering over three per cent the last 14 days (sat at 3.24 per cent for seven-day average as of Wednesday.)

"If we weren't in a provincial shutdown, that would put us in the red zone," said Bocking, echoing the need for all to continue following public health measures.

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