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LOCAL : NEWS

HKPR health unit prepared to enact restrictions as confirmed COVID-19 case numbers triple in one week

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit medical officer of health Dr. Natalie Bocking says the doubling of cases every two to three days was expected given the highly infectious nature of the Omicron variant

By **Catherine Whitnall** Reporter

Wed., Dec. 29, 2021 |  2 min. read

In just one week, COVID-19 cases in the local health unit region have almost tripled, pushing the rolling average from 83 to 231 cases per 100,000 population.

While the ongoing surge in numbers is obviously a concern the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit isn't pushing the proverbial panic button.

"The surge in local COVID-19 cases is not unexpected," said medical officer of health Dr. Natalie Bocking. "We knew Omicron would quickly become the dominant strain in Ontario, which it has, and that cases of it are doubling every two or three days. This is due to Omicron being highly infectious."

According to Ontario's COVID-19 Science Advisory Table, Omicron is infecting 6.1 times more individuals than the Delta variant.

On Wednesday (Dec. 29), the health unit reported 91 new confirmed cases - two in Haliburton, 22 in the Kawartha Lakes and 56 in Northumberland - bringing the region's total to date to 3,293. Just two weeks earlier (Dec. 15) the total was 2,686. Three people are currently admitted to hospital; two in intensive care.

The health unit is also monitoring several outbreaks declared during the holidays. These include North Hope Central Public School in Campbellford (Dec. 22), Spring Valley Public School in Brighton (Dec. 23), Cobourg congregate setting Christian Horizons (Dec. 24), Northumberland Hills Hospital and Golden Plough Lodge long-term care home, both in Cobourg (Dec. 26) and Hope Street Terrace long-term care home in Port Hope (Dec. 28).

Dr. Bocking said both the province, and the local health unit, continue to monitor the situation to see if additional restrictions are needed.

"At this point, we encourage everyone to redouble their efforts to stop the spread of covid," continued Dr. Bocking.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, Dr. Bocking urges everyone to practice the "tried-and-true" COVID-19 preventative measures that are invaluable in helping to stop the spread.

These include:

- Get your COVID-19 vaccine booster when eligible. Get your first and second dose if you have not done so already. COVID-19 vaccine boosters can reduce the risk of serious illness and hospitalization from the Omicron variant.
- Stay two metres (six feet) apart from anyone outside your household.
- Limit your contacts and gatherings with others outside your household.

- Wear a tightly-fitting face mask when out in the public (especially indoors), or when unable to stay two metres apart from others when outdoors.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and water.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue. Dispose of the tissue and wash your hands.

For more information regarding the health unit's pandemic response visit www.hkpr.on.ca.

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