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LOCAL : NEWS

'Not reflective of the actual cases': HKPR health unit urges public to stay the course in COVID-19 battle

Numbers do not accurately represent the burden the virus is having on the community as only lab confirmed cases are currently being reported

By **Catherine Whitnall** Reporter

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The local health unit is cautioning the public to not take any declines in COVID-19 numbers as an indication that ground is being gained in the battle against Omicron.

Confirmed cases only one piece of the pandemic puzzle, says Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit medical officer of health Dr. Natalie Bocking, as numbers don't reflect actual cases; only those confirmed by a laboratory.

"We know that the number of active cases on our dashboard is not reflective of the actual cases of COVID-19 in our communities," says Dr. Bocking adding it's still "indicative of the covid activity in the community".

Dr. Bocking also points out the recent decline in rates is also impacted by changes to eligibility for PCR testing and the fact that, while vaccines help protect people against the virus, even being fully vaccinated people can still get sick.

"Because the vast majority of people in the region are fully vaccinated - reported as having two doses of COVID-19 vaccine - they would automatically account for more cases that turn up in the health unit region," says Dr. Bocking. "This also explains the relatively low percentage of unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people winding up in hospital and ICU compared to those who are fully vaccinated."

Based on provincial data that shows the vaccination status of people in hospital Intensive Care Units (ICU), just over half of current ICU patients are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated.

"This is a significantly higher percentage of people being in the ICU when you look at the fact 85 per cent of the population has received two doses of COVID-19 vaccine," continued Dr. Bocking.

"While the provincial definition of 'fully vaccinated' remains two doses of vaccine, emerging evidence indicates getting a booster dose greatly improves protection against the highly transmissible Omicron variant, including reducing the risk of serious illness and hospitalization. . . . As more data becomes available, we'll see the impact of booster doses for protection. . . That's why everyone who is eligible is encouraged to get a booster dose."

Of the 16 individuals admitted to hospital in the last 14 days, four of whom are in the ICU, eight are aged 70 or older while two are in the 10 to 19 age bracket. None of those admitted to hospital had received a booster dose.

Currently, 70 per cent of those aged 70 and older in the region have received their booster; 43 per cent of those 18 and older.

Dr. Bocking also continues to stress the importance of following public safety guidelines including masking, physical distancing, hand washing and sanitizing, and, most importantly, staying home if sick.

For more information on vaccination clinics visit www.hkpr.on.ca.