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LOCAL : NEWS

Health unit urges people to fully vaccinate to limit COVID-19 case surge in Kawartha Lakes, Northumberland

Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit says 63 per cent of residents who tested positive since July 1 were not vaccinated

By **Catherine Whitnall** Reporter

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The local area is not seeing surges in COVID-19 cases but medical officer of health Dr. Natalie Bocking cautions that could change quickly if people fail to continue to practice measures to reduce the virus' spread.

The Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit's case rate currently sits at 6.9 per 100,000 people with a test positivity rate (as of Nov. 9) of 0.7 per cent.

"We're very fortunate to not be experiencing the same surge in cases as other areas," said Dr. Bocking, noting other areas have seen rates as high as 100 per 100,000 people. "In fact, in some cases, it's the highest they've ever seen."

Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been 2,522 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Northumberland and Haliburton counties and the City of Kawartha Lakes. At this point (Nov. 17), the health unit is reporting 14 cases; six in Kawartha Lakes, seven in Northumberland and one in Haliburton. There have been two hospitalizations.

There are presently no outbreaks.

In the last 14 days, there have been a total of 25 school cases reported, none of which is related to spread in schools.

Of the total confirmed cases, Dr. Bocking said 41.7 per cent did not have a confirmed source of transmission and the highest concentration of cases (25 per cent) were in the 50 to 59 age group.

Dr. Bocking also noted that, of the 362 cases reported in the area since July 1, close to two thirds (63.1 per cent) involved unvaccinated individuals.

While she is optimistic the health unit can meet the provincial benchmark of 90 per cent of residents being partially or fully vaccinated – 86.5 per cent of those 12 and older have received one dose – Dr. Bocking is concerned over the "steady decline" in vaccinations administered over the last three weeks. Where clinics used to see roughly 1,000 people per day, the numbers dropped by more than half to around 400 in the summer. In recent days, clinics have provided 200 or fewer doses.

As of Nov. 15, 83.7 per cent of eligible residents have received two doses, and the health unit, along with primary care providers, have begun offering third or "booster" doses.

"But we know that being vaccinated is not a 100 per cent guarantee against COVID-19," said Dr. Bocking, who pointed out 20 per cent of those who tested positive for the virus in the last four months were fully vaccinated. "We know that we're not an island. We know that people move in and out of the HKPR jurisdiction ... The key is to continue to practice the basics."

This, she emphasized, includes wearing a mask, physical distancing, being "cautious and aware" when choosing to be in group settings and, when ill, staying home and/or getting tested.