

VARIANT CASES DOUBLING RAPIDLY: PUBLIC HEALTH

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH EXTREMELY CONCERNED

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The number of COVID-19 variant cases in Halton is rising quickly, with local health officials saying the majority of infections are being contracted through community transmission.

This was among the details Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Hamidah Meghani shared during her update to regional council March 24.

The region's top doctor said that in early January, almost none of the reported new cases of COVID-19 were confirmed or likely variant cases, which are

considered highly contagious. But by mid-March, this figure had risen to 36 per cent.

"It's now taking only about 1.7 weeks for the count of new variant cases reported since Jan. 1 to double, compared to 12.6 weeks for nonvariant cases," she said.

Meghani also explained that the reproduction number for local variant cases is 1.1, meaning every variant case is infecting 1.1 people on average, compared to 0.8 for nonvariant cases.

"This is especially troubling when you consider that reproduction number should ideally be much lower than one for variant cases, given that they are known to be more contagious," she said.

Of the 383 total Halton variant cases at the time of the meeting — 26 con-

firmed for the U.K. variant and 357 that screened positive — only nine per cent of the individuals had travelled or been in close contact with someone who has travelled, noted Meghani.

"This means that the vast majority of our cases likely acquired their variant strain infection from community transmission right here in Ontario," she said.

The U.K. variant, along with variants originating from South Africa and Brazil, have been labelled "variants of concern," as they are believed to be more contagious than the regular strain of COVID-19.

The doubling time and reproduction number of variant cases "support the assessment of a parallel variant pandemic that has become a third wave," said Meghani.



Metroland file photo

Dr. Hamidah Meghani, Halton Region's Medical Officer of Health has expressed her concern with the rapid rise in COVID-19 variant cases.

Now, Halton and the rest of the province are in "a race between the rise of variants and vaccinations efforts," she added.

With vaccinations in

Halton's long-term care and retirements homes almost complete, and the inoculation of older adults in the community underway, Meghani said Halton is be-

ginning to see the benefits of the vaccines, with cases declining significantly among those 80 and older.

The number of outbreaks in hospitals, long-term care and retirement homes has also decreased, going from double-digits throughout the fall and winter to only one as of March 25.

"However, we are continuing to declare many new outbreaks in workplaces and schools particularly, with some involving variant cases," she noted.

For further details on local COVID-19 cases and vaccines, visit www.halton.ca/COVID19.

— With files from Louie Rosella.

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