

Fourth shots aren't needed in York Region just yet for most populations: Public Health

A fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine has been rolling out to Ontarians who live in congregate care settings or are severely immunocompromised, but another booster isn't needed just yet in York Region, according to Dr. Barry Pakes, York's Medical Officer of Health.

In his weekly pandemic update, Mr. Pakes said while fourth doses of the vaccine have been distributed in those specific circumstances, it's the third doses that are "critical" for the general population.

"The evidence on fourth doses is accumulating worldwide and it looks very promising for those at higher risk, but not necessarily for those in Ontario at this time," he said. "For now, it's third doses that are critical for everyone" especially if your second dose has been over six months ago. There is good evidence that the effectiveness of the vaccine does wane over time."

That being said, however, Dr. Pakes said COVID-19 transmission in York Region remains high and is on the rise following the lifting of mask mandates. This rise is something that York Region Public Health expected, he said, but current vaccine coverage is helping keep things stable.

"Our wastewater surveillance in York Region and indeed across Ontario is showing a significant and sustained signal increase," he said. "We did expect to see this after reopening last month and with the recent removal of mask mandates. Fortunately, thanks to our exceptional vaccine coverage, we're not yet seeing a significant increase in other indicators, including hospitalization, ICU admissions, deaths, and outbreaks in institutional settings. In York Region, these metrics are stable. In some other regions of Ontario, we are seeing increases in these areas.

"Last week, when mask mandates were lifted in most indoor settings across the Province, including businesses and schools, many York Region residents continued to wear masks to protect themselves and to protect others. Thank you for this. Wearing a mask is now a personal decision, but this decision affects you and others. Whatever your choice, please remember to be kind. Everyone is fighting a different fight through this pandemic and someone's choice to remain cautious could be for many reasons, including living with someone who is at high risk for greater complications or if they are immunocompromised themselves.

"I urge you to continue wearing masks in situations where you're faced with the three Cs: crowds, close contact, or confined spaces with potentially poor ventilation. I urge you to at least have a mask with you, that way you can put it on as required. If you're recovering from a COVID-19 infection, please continue to wear your masks at least five days beyond your self-isolation period. If you're a close contact or are showing any signs of COVID-19, please stay home."

LOCAL STATS

As of Monday, March 28, Aurora was experiencing 44 confirmed active cases of COVID-19, according to York Region Public Health.

But, as the Region notes, this number is an under-estimate of the real number.

"With rapid transmission of Omicron and recent provincial changes in testing eligibility and case management, case counts and outbreaks reported through the COVID-19 in York Region interactive dashboard are an under-estimate of the true number of individuals with COVID-19 and outbreaks in York Region," the Region stated at the start of January, adding case counts should be treated with caution. "Public Health units across Ontario are prioritizing case management of high-risk individuals and settings. Workplace outbreaks are no longer reported."

The Region is no longer reporting source of exposure for active cases.

Since the start of the global pandemic, York Region Public Health had been able to confirm 4,425 PCR-confirmed cumulative cases of COVID-19 in Aurora as of March 28. 4,320 cases are now marked as resolved. There have been 61 fatalities attributed to the virus.

90.1 per cent of Aurora residents aged 5 and up have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, while 87.8 per cent had received two doses by the start of the week.

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