

Omicron transmission rates still high despite downward trend: Public Health

York Region Public Health is continuing to see a downward trend in COVID-19 as Spring continues.

In his weekly update on the local COVID-19 situation on Monday, Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, said wastewater signals for the virus are stabilizing and "continue to point towards a downward trend."

"This is a sign of better days to come with the possibility of lower transmission through the summer," he said. "We're hearing many of our friends and family members, often the last of those who have not yet had COVID, or some getting it for the second time, who are sick with various degrees of symptoms and severity. These infections are what continue to be seen in our wastewater."

"There are high levels of transmission relative to waves prior to Omicron," he continued. "However, positivity rates are decreasing and while our hospitals are still struggling with admissions from COVID-19, as well as severe non-COVID illness in emergency rooms and in their inpatient wards, there are optimistic signs as well. It is important we continue to take COVID-19 symptoms seriously and stay home when you're not feeling well."

The use of rapid tests, he said, can be helpful if you develop symptoms like a cough, fever, or any decrease in your taste and smell "and, if you do, you should assume you have the virus and might be contagious."

"If you're using a rapid test, the Ontario Science Advisory Table says you should swab the inside of your cheek, then your tongue and the back of your throat, and then your nostrils to make the test more accurate. If you perform only a nostril swab, you could miss the infection as it is believed the viral load of Omicron peaks later in the nose than it does in the throat."

Vaccine immunity, he underscored, does wane over time, "usually within three to five months", particularly for older individuals. Receiving your third and fourth doses of a vaccine now is "critical" to remain protected, especially for those who are older, immune compromised, or at risk for any other reason."

Now that trends are going in a positive direction, York Region Public Health is resuming in-school vaccination programs for Grade 7 students. These vaccinations include those for Hepatitis B, meningococcal meningitis, and HVP, which protects against cervical cancer.

"We're now able to offer these vaccinations to eligible youth who may be due or may have missed their vaccines during the pandemic," said Dr. Pakes. "School boards and families who are eligible may have been notified with this reminder to catch up on these important immunizations and we are available on Tuesdays or Thursdays at our community clinics and we're hoping to create more availability soon."

LOCAL STATS

As of Tuesday, May 17, Aurora was experiencing 37 active PCR-confirmed cases of COVID-19, according to York Region Public Health "but the true number is likely much higher."

Since the start of the global pandemic, the community has seen a total of 4,816 PCR-confirmed cases of COVID-19, 4,716 of which are now marked as recovered.

There have been 63 fatalities attributed to the virus since March of 2020.

By the start of the week, 90.5 per cent of Aurora residents aged five and up have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. 88.3 per cent of residents in the same age bracket have received two doses.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter