

Proceed with caution this summer as COVID may be on the rise again, Public Health warns

Summer is here and so are plans for holidays and get-togethers ? but as the warmer weather settles in and the holiday weekend approaches, there are signs that COVID-19 may again be on the rise throughout the community.

This was the message delivered by Dr. Fareen Karachiwalla, Associate Medical Officer of Health for the Region of York, in the department's bi-weekly COVID update.

There has been a slight increase in COVID-19 in York Region when measuring signals in wastewater, she said, but it is too early to know what this means in terms of the impact on the community.

?We're continuing to monitor this early trend and will share any information as soon as we know more [but] regardless of increases or decreases we see in our wastewater, we do know that COVID-19 is still very present in York Region,? said Dr. Karachiwalla. ?Hospitals are experiencing capacity issues and staff absences are still a serious problem. While the hospital admissions are lower than they were earlier this year, COVID-19 continues to strain our acute care system.

?This summer, in order to keep things at bay, there are a few important things you can do. Continue with your plans but proceed with caution. Don't forget that Omicron and its variants are more easily spread. Take things outside when you can for better ventilation, carry a mask with you so that if you do find yourself in one of the three Cs ? confined spaces, crowds, or close contact with others ? you can put it on.?

It is also important, she added, to monitor yourself for symptoms and remain home if you're unwell.

?The single most important thing you can do at this time to ensure you and your family and friends stay safe during a summer where things are looking up and people are more comfortable to go on vacation, to family cottages and the rest, is to keep up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines,? she said. ?Immunization remains a very safe and effective way to help prevent becoming very ill from COVID-19 and York Region Public Health clinics are now accepting walk-ins for all doses. Remember, while COVID-19 vaccines are pretty good at preventing you from getting COVID, they're even better at preventing you from getting very sick and needing hospital or ICU care if you do get the infection.

?For the most part, up to date means two doses if you're between five and 11, three doses if you're over 12, and four doses if you're over 60. People over the age of 60 have been eligible for their fourth dose for some time now, so if you haven't received it yet you should do so right away. Those people eligible for a fourth dose are more vulnerable to serious effects if they get COVID-19, like a higher chance of being hospitalized or getting very sick. Don't hesitate to get the extra protection immediately.?

Even if you have already had the COVID-19 virus, there is still a risk of re-infection after ?some time,? she cautioned, and the protection the vaccine offers is still needed.

?With every infection there is a risk that experts are still learning more about on developing what people are now calling ?Long COVID.' Interestingly, there's early evidence to suggest that people with two or more vaccine doses are actually at a lower risk of getting long COVID if they do get infected. Thank you to those who are up to date on the number of vaccines needed for the best protection. We know that many of you are eager to get your little ones under five vaccinated as soon as possible, given the news of an approved vaccine across the border. Details should be coming soon about the rollout in Canada and we will share any information for vaccinations for this age group as soon as it is available.?

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