

## Public health preparing for challenging fall as wastewater signals dip

Wastewater signals on the level of COVID-19 in the community might be on the wane, but hospitals are still facing significant pressures and are bracing for an even more challenging fall.

In his latest update on the local COVID-19 situation, Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, says wastewater signals in York Region and indeed most parts of the GTA are seeing a 'levelling off.'

This is a 'hopeful sign' that might 'translate into lower cases in hospitals in the near future' but there's a long road ahead, he cautioned.

'We have all seen the disturbing images of our acute care hospitals across the Province buckling under the pressure of the seventh wave of the pandemic as well as the cumulated health care needs and the health care human resource crisis,' said Pakes. 'In Public Health, our role continues to be to do our part and to help inform York Region residents on how they can do their part to continue to decrease the burden. For now, this is a familiar refrain: we need to continue to get vaccinated, in particular, York Region residents who have only had two doses can and should get their third doses to protect themselves and to protect others and the system in anticipation of a fall wave.'

All York Region residents over the age of 18 are currently eligible for a fourth dose and, ahead of a new bivalent vaccine coming from Moderna this fall, now is the time to get the latest booster, Dr. Pakes added.

This new vaccine is expected to provide 'enhance protection' against the Omicron variants and will be made available in a similar prioritized way to previous vaccines once available.

'There will likely be a minimum interval between the doses of three months, so the sooner you get your fourth dose the sooner you'll be eligible for the bivalent vaccine,' he said. 'We are excited that we have had an excellent start to the long-awaited vaccine for children ages zero to four years old. In York Region, the response has been great with eager families booking vaccine for their young ones and special clinics tailored to the needs of young children. This vaccine is especially important for children who are in daycare or group settings, or are immunocompromised or otherwise vulnerable. But it is also important for those who have older or vulnerable household members and families.'

'I know everyone has been gathering with friends and loved ones or attending events this summer, which we all need for our mental and social wellbeing after the past few years, but this pandemic is far from over and we're very actively planning for a fall surge, not only of COVID-19 but also other respiratory infections we haven't seen in many years. For now, as always, our goal is to minimize cases as low as they can go to give us a runway to the fall.'

In addition to getting vaccinated, please be aware of your own symptoms and isolate where appropriate. If you have any new COVID-19 symptoms like a cough, cold or fever, please remain home and limit your interactions with others. You can reschedule your plans and let your close contacts know about your symptoms so they can monitor themselves as well.'

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