

## Remaining mask mandates extended until June 11

Remaining mask mandates on transit, in health care settings and in congregate care settings have been extended until June 11 as York Region sees a slowdown of new cases in COVID-19's sixth wave.

In his weekly update on the local COVID-19 situation, Dr. Barry Pakes, York Region's Medical Officer of Health, said that wastewater signals are showing positive signs.

“As we make our way through the sixth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, we're seeing some glimmers of hope as our wastewater signals locally and in many parts of Ontario are showing signs of a plateau, albeit at a very high level of transmission in the community. We're also seeing increased transmission and outbreaks in congregate living settings, group homes, and retirement homes.

“Fortunately, in these settings and in the community, high levels of vaccination with three or four doses is largely protecting these vulnerable individuals and all others, including those who care for them, from severe illness.”

But, he noted, hospitalizations continue to rise across the Region, a concerning development as it impacts “the capacity and care that we all may need to access.”

With the extension of mask mandates in these three specific settings, Dr. Pakes says in other settings “we can each make decisions that help us all by following the strong recommendation to mask in all indoor settings until the sixth wave is behind us.”

That, he added, includes the school setting for students, staff and visitors.

“Over the past few weeks, we have seen a significant increase in student and staff absences at our York Region schools,” said Dr. Pakes. “For this reason, in partnership with our school boards, we continue to strongly recommend that students, staff members and visitors wear a mask in school, especially following the gatherings, holiday and long weekend earlier this month. Wearing a mask in schools will help reduce transmission and prevent the need for school closures. It will help protect students, staff and keep everyone in school and in person.

“Other than vaccination, masks are the greatest defence we have against the spread of COVID-19. Evidence shows that those who are vaccinated and boosted have lower viral loads meaning they have less virus to infect others, even if they do not get particularly ill or are not at high risk themselves.

“Warm weather is around the corner and this means two things: people will begin to gather in outdoor settings, which is a welcome change, and for many it is also allergy season. It's often hard to tell the difference between allergies and a common cold and a COVID-19 symptom. If these are new symptoms for you or you think you just have a common cold, please take a rapid antigen test and stay home to prevent possible transmission of COVID-19.”

To date, York Region has administered more than 33,000 fourth doses since they became available, a number Dr. Pakes said was encouraging.

“Receiving a booster protects you against hospitalization and severe illness and it is the best thing we can do to protect ourselves and each other.”

### LOCAL STATS

Aurora has lost its 62nd resident to COVID-19.

On Friday, York Region Public Health confirmed a woman in her 90s died on April 15 with COVID-19. Her exposure to the virus is not known.

As of Tuesday, April 26, the Town was grappling with 50 PCR-confirmed cases of the virus, although this number is expected to be significantly higher than the figures confirmed by Public Health. To date, Aurora has seen a total of 4,688 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the start of the global pandemic and 4,576 cases are now marked as recovered.

90.3 per cent of Aurora residents aged 5 and up had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine while 88.2 per cent have received at least two doses.

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