

April 14, 2022

To: All local municipalities within the geographical area served by Peterborough Public Health

RE: Medical Officer of Health recommendations for enhanced public health measures at facilities owned and operated by local municipalities

For the past two years, Peterborough Public Health (PPH) has supported local municipalities with their response to the global COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of this work has been to provide municipal leaders and decision makers with timely research, best practices, and data so that appropriate public health measures could be implemented to mitigate the harms caused by COVID-19 across our region.

Unfortunately, after two long years of this pandemic, the threat of COVID-19 continues to be significant for our community. Current wastewater data shows that COVID-19 continues to circulate in Peterborough City and County, and there have been 32 local deaths associated with COVID-19 in the first quarter of 2022 alone. During the week of March 13-19th, the COVID-19 weekly death rate in PPH was 2 per 100,000 population, as compared to the provincial weekly death rate of 0.4 per 100,000 for same week.¹ We are fortunate to have a high local 2-dose vaccination rate for individuals 12 years and older, however, research shows that “a complete vaccine series (currently two doses in children 5+, three doses in adults, four in long-term care residents and other eligible high-risk groups) is the best defence against getting and spreading COVID-19.”² Until our local vaccine rates are very high in these categories, our community is still vulnerable and the threat of severe illness will be an ongoing reality for our residents who are elderly, immunocompromised, medically-at-risk, unvaccinated, or partially vaccinated.³

Recently, the Ontario government changed the focus for implementation of public health measures with a move from province-wide to a more local level assessment and implementation. In response to this, PPH has created a [COVID-19 Community Risk Index](#) that is derived from six COVID-19 indicators that will be updated each week to communicate the risk for COVID-19 transmission across our region.⁴ For each level of risk, PPH has created personal protection guidance for the general population, as well as for high-risk populations. To ensure these messages are broadly communicated, it is my hope that, at a minimum, municipalities will support PPH by broadly communicating to residents to ensure they know the risk level each week and the personal protection practices they should adopt to minimize their risk of exposure.

Further to this, given that the Peterborough region continues to experience surges of COVID-19 transmission which has contributed to outbreaks in our local high-risk settings, strain on our local health care system, an increase to the number of local residents needing hospital care and/or ICU admission, and unfortunately, death,⁵ **I am recommending that municipalities implement enhanced public health measures, in your municipal facilities whenever the PPH region is in high or very high-risk scenarios.** Enhanced public health measures include, but are not limited to:

- Mandatory mask policy for all workers in indoor settings, including work vehicles (limited exemptions apply).
- Mandatory mask policy for all patrons while inside municipal facilities (limited exemptions apply).
- Passive screening signage posted at every entrance.
- Communication to groups using municipal facilities or patrons attending events hosted at municipal facilities about the COVID-19 risk level and recommended personal protection measures, including reminders to stay home when ill.

Further to these recommendations, I urge every municipality to consider the adoption of municipal by-laws to enhance masking requirements more broadly across each municipality. Municipal by-laws have been used by a number of municipalities across Ontario throughout the pandemic to ensure adequate coverage, particularly when there were gaps with provincial requirements. Please continue to follow your typical procedures for legal consultations as you consider the implementation of these policies and by-laws.

By role modelling enhanced public health measures in publicly accessible facilities, it signals to the community the ongoing risks of COVID-19 and the simple, yet effective protection measures our community leaders are taking to protect all residents, including the most vulnerable who experience significantly more inequities from COVID-19.⁶ Moreover, I would like to stress that the enhanced measures listed above, have been called for in numerous bodies of research as effective prevention measures to reduce the risk of COVID-19.^{7,8,9} Specifically, research conducted by Public Health Ontario shows that severe morbidity and mortality can be prevented by masking policies.¹⁰ Masking, in particular, can have significant impacts of broader protection, and is a public health measure that is “less restrictive and disruptive to society than many other public health measures applied during the pandemic, such as school or business closures.”¹¹

Lastly, under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#), employers have a duty to take all possible and reasonable precautions to protect the health and safety of all their workers. Implementing policies related to the use of masks in the workplace is one such precaution that can go a long way to protecting workers from COVID-19 and may also subsequently prevent interruptions to business due to staff absenteeism as a result of illness.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for your unwavering partnership over the past two years as we have worked to protect our community from COVID-19. While there are still unknowns about what lies ahead with this pandemic, I am confident that together, we can create lower risk environments for our residents, thereby reducing the risk for COVID-19 transmission, and allowing key services in our region, such as businesses and schools, to continue to operate.

The team at PPH remains committed to supporting you with any potential next steps and guidance you may require. Please be in touch if you have questions or require additional resources.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

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Medical Officer of Health and CEO
Peterborough Public Health

¹ Peterborough Public Health. (2022). Local COVID-19 Tracker. Accessed March 24, 2022 from: www.localcovidtracker.ca

² Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table. (2022, February 1). Update on COVID-19 Projections February 1, 2022. Accessed March 24, 2022 from: https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Update-on-COVID-19-Projections_2022.02.01_English-4.pdf

³ Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table (2022, March 17). Update on COVID-19 Projections March 27, 2022. Accessed March 31, 2022 from: https://covid19-sciencetable.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Update-on-COVID-19-Projections_2022.03.17_English-1.pdf

⁴ Peterborough Public Health. (2022). COVID-19 Community Risk Index. Accessed April 12, 2022 from: <https://www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/covid-19-risk-index/>

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ontario Hospital Association. (2022). Research and information on COVID-19: Social determinants of health. Accessed April 13, 2022 from: <https://www.oha.com/news/research-and-information-on-covid-19-social-determinants-of-health>

⁷ Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). COVID-19 Omicron variant sub-lineage BA.2: evidence and risk assessment (up to date as of April 5, 2022). Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2022. Accessed April 13, 2022 from: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/nCoV/voc/covid-19-omicron-risk-assessment.pdf?sc_lang=en

⁸ Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Public health measures and COVID-19 epidemiology in select international jurisdictions (current up to April 6, 2022). Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2022. Accessed April 13,

2022 from: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/nCoV/epi/2022/04/env-scan-changes-PHM-epi-select-jurisdictions-apr-6.pdf?sc_lang=en

⁹ Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public health Ontario). Association between mask mandates and population-level COVID-19 outcomes –What We Know So Far. Toronto, ON: Queen’s Printer for Ontario; 2022. Accessed April 12, 2022 from: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/nCoV/COVID-WWKSF/2022/03/wwksf-mask-mandates-population-level-outcomes.pdf?sc_lang=en

¹⁰ Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). COVID-19 Omicron variant sub-lineage BA.2: evidence and risk assessment (up to date as of April 5, 2022). Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2022. Accessed April 13, 2022 from: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/nCoV/voc/covid-19-omicron-risk-assessment.pdf?sc_lang=en

¹¹ Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public health Ontario). Association between mask mandates and population-level COVID-19 outcomes –What We Know So Far. Toronto, ON: Queen’s Printer for Ontario; 2022. Accessed April 12, 2022 from: https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/Documents/nCoV/COVID-WWKSF/2022/03/wwksf-mask-mandates-population-level-outcomes.pdf?sc_lang=en