

April 13, 2022

Medical Officer of Health Recommends Masking and Vaccination Policies to Prevent COVID-19

- TO:** All Employers and Persons Responsible for businesses and organizations located in the City of Peterborough and County of Peterborough
- RE:** Peterborough Public Health Recommendation for all Workplaces in the City and County of Peterborough to have COVID-19 vaccination and mask policies for staff

For the past two years, Peterborough Public Health (PPH) has supported local workplaces, businesses and organizations to adapt to the ongoing pandemic and be responsive to the threat of COVID-19. The goal of this work was to create spaces where your staff, patrons, and clients could continue to engage with your business or organization, and be protected by appropriate public health measures.

The threat of COVID-19 continues to be significant for our community. Current wastewater data shows that COVID-19 is continuing to circulate in Peterborough City and County, and Peterborough City and County suffered 32 deaths associated with COVID-19 in the first quarter of this year from January 1 - March 31, 2022. For example, for 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 Based on PPH's [COVID-19 Community Risk Index](#), as of April 13, 2022 our current risk level for COVID-19 has been increased from high risk to very-high risk.

The Peterborough region continues to experience surges of COVID-19 transmission which has contributed to outbreaks in high-risk settings, increased hospitalizations and ICU admissions, and unfortunately, death.² 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."³ 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.⁴

Likewise, over the past year, there have been new variants of the COVID-19 virus that have emerged, some of which have significantly impacted our community and the Province of Ontario (e.g., Delta, Omicron).⁵ When a variant has a larger impact it is due to the strain having more concerning transmissibility, increased virulence, decreased vaccine effectiveness, and/or changes to diagnostic testing.⁶ As witnessed from Omicron, when a new variant is detected, there can be little time to react and create preparedness plans. As COVID-19 continues to surge around the world, the risk of a new variant emerging continues to be probable.⁷

In light of these factors, coupled with the evidence that vaccines are safe and effective and that mandatory mask use in public indoor settings is important and an effective layer of control, **PPH is strongly urging your workplace, business or organization to maintain or reimplement masking policies for staff for the short term.** It would be prudent to re-evaluate lifting these policies later in the spring when there is a better understanding of the magnitude of the 6th wave of COVID-19. Likewise, if you haven't already, **PPH is urging you to develop and implement a workplace vaccine policy for your staff**, requiring all employees be [up to date on COVID vaccination](#).

We know that hospitalizations, ICU admissions, and deaths are lagging indicators; we also know that severe morbidity and mortality can be prevented by masking and vaccine policies. 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.”⁸ Policy Requirements for mask use could be linked to the [COVID-19 Risk Index](#) and required specifically when the risk is high or very high. As a reminder, 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.

We’re hoping that since these systems are already in place, you can continue to maintain these simple but effective public health measures. The team at PPH remains committed to supporting your institution with any potential next steps and guidance you may require, and have **attached a sample policy** that could be used for your workplace. For more information about masks please refer to the [PPH masks and personal protective equipment webpage](#). Please be in touch if you have questions or require additional resources. In addition, please be reminded about our online COVID-19 workplace outbreak reporting tool where you can [report workplace outbreaks of COVID-19](#). This tool helps PPH to have a better idea of where transmission within workplaces is occurring in our community.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

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

² Ibid.

³ Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table. (2022, February 1). Update on COVID-19 Projections February 1, 2022. Accessed March 24, 2022 from: https://covid19-science-table.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Update-on-COVID-19-Projections_2022.02.01_English-4.pdf

⁴ Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table (2022, March 17). Update on COVID-19 Projections March 27, 2022. Accessed March 31, 2022 from: https://covid19-science-table.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Update-on-COVID-19-Projections_2022.03.17_English-1.pdf

⁵ Public Health Ontario. (2022, January 28). COVID-19 Variants of Concern. Accessed March 24, 2022 from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/novel-coronavirus/variants#:~:text=PHO%20is%20working%20with%20the,that%20have%20changed%20or%20mutated.>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Government of Canada. (2022, February 16). COVID-19 Variants of Concern. Accessed March 31, 2022 from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html#a8>

⁸ 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