

TO:	Mayor and Members Board of Health
COMMITTEE DATE:	July 7, 2021
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Infection Prevention and Control Measures for High-Rise Apartment Buildings and High-Rise Condominiums with 12 or More Storeys (BOH21007) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Dr. Ninh Tran (905) 546-2424 Ext. 7113 Latchman Nandu (905) 546-2424 Ext. 5813 Robin Dozet (905) 546-2424 Ext. 7460 Heather Harvey (905) 546-2424 Ext. 3635
SUBMITTED BY:	Dr. Elizabeth Richardson, MD, MHSc, FRCPC Medical Officer of Health Public Health Services
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

- (a) That the Board of Health endorse the Medical Officer of Health issuing a Letter of Instructions under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020*, S.O. 2020, c. 17 ("the *Reopening Ontario Act*") to all persons responsible for High-rise Apartment Buildings and High-rise Condominium Buildings, as defined in the letter, requiring them to take infection prevention & control measures to protect residents, employees, and visitors of these residential buildings from contracting and/or spreading COVID-19; and,
- (b) That the matter respecting Report BOH21007, Infection Prevention and Control Measures for High-Rise Apartment Buildings and High-Rise Condominiums with 12 or More Storeys, be identified as complete and removed from the Board of Health Outstanding Business List (Item 2021-C).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses the motion from the Board of Health at its June 14, 2021 meeting:

"That staff be directed to report back to the Board of Health on the implementation of the following COVID-19 related requirements regarding Multiple Residential Apartment Buildings – Highrise 1 and 2 Buildings:

- Proper PPE given to building staff while working in the building;
- Signage in common areas encouraging social distancing and handwashing;
- Placement of hand sanitizer in common areas;
- Disinfection of high contact surfaces twice a day;
- Posting a cleaning schedule;
- Regular updates to tenants on COVID-19 measures; and,
- Provide free PPE in common areas."

After reviewing available options, the Medical Officer of Health will issue a Letter of Instruction (LOI) requiring all persons responsible for High-rise Apartment Buildings and High-rise Condominium Buildings, with 12 or more storeys in the City of Hamilton to adhere to certain COVID-19 safety requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19, including preparing a COVID-19 safety plan.

A COVID-19 safety plan is a detailed outline for how building owners will protect against COVID-19 transmission in their building to ensure residents, employees, and visitors are safe. The safety plan must describe the measures and procedures which have been implemented, or will be implemented, in the High-rise Apartment Building or High-rise Condominium Building to reduce the transmission risk of COVID-19 in the building. Persons responsible for these types of residential buildings must also designate an employee in a managerial role, to be responsible for implementing, updating, and monitoring compliance with the safety plan as well as ensuring it is posted in a conspicuous place in the building.

In addition to the preparation and implementation of the safety plan, persons responsible for the residential building will be required to implement the following infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures:

- promoting physical distancing in building common areas;
- promoting the use of masks or face coverings in building common areas;
- providing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees;
- cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces and shared objects;
- providing hand hygiene stations;
- ensuring the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system is functioning and maintained as per manufacturer's instructions; and

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

- keeping residents informed of COVID-19 public health measures.

Complaints can be called into the City's Call Centre and will be triaged to the COVID-19 Enforcement team to investigate. Enforcement by the COVID-19 team will be reactive and complaint based.

Alternatives for Consideration – Not Applicable

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: Not Applicable.

Staffing: Not Applicable.

Legal: Not Applicable.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In Q2 of 2021, Hamilton Public Health Services declared three COVID-19 outbreaks at three different High-rise Apartment Buildings, which resulted in 225 cases, five hospitalizations and one death among residents, and four cases among staff members. In collaboration with other community partners, Hamilton Public Health Services responded to these outbreaks by conducting case and contact management investigations for all cases who tested positive, working with property management to determine factors that contributed to the spread of the virus within the apartment buildings and ensuring IPAC measures were in place, conducting mass testing, and providing both vaccination for those living and working in the buildings through both fixed site and mobile clinics.

On June 14, 2021 the Board of Health passed a motion directing staff to report back on implementing COVID-19 related requirements in Multiple Residential Apartment Buildings – Highrise 1 and 2 buildings.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

No policy implication have been identified.

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Staff from the following areas were consulted to inform this report:

- Planning & Economic Development;
 - Municipal Licensing & By-Law Services: June 17, 2021;

- Community Planning & GIS: June 21, 2021;
- Building Division: June 21, 2021.
- Hamilton Fire Department Fire Prevention Division: June 22, 2021; and,
- Legal Services: June 2021.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Building owners and residents have an essential role in preventing the transmission of COVID-19 infections and keeping our communities safe. While there is a decreasing trend in overall COVID-19 cases, continued adherence to public health measures where we live, work, and play is prudent to preventing transmission of the COVID-19 virus and its variants.

COVID-19 is primarily spread by close contact to people who are infected with COVID-19 through exposure to respiratory droplets carrying infectious virus. As such, household members and close contacts of infected individuals continue to be at greatest risk of infection due to their direct contact with the COVID-19 virus. While the risk is low, it is also possible for transmission to occur indirectly through contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.¹

Concerns around the indirect transmission of the COVID-19 virus and its variants in High-rise Apartment Buildings and High-rise Condominium Buildings are high. Literature on COVID-19 outbreaks in multiple unit dwellings indicates transmission in buildings can occur through both close contact exposure to individuals inside and outside the residential unit and through indirect or environmental routes of transmission.² While transmission via close contact between members of the same household remains the most common means through which COVID-19 is spread,² individual adherence to public health measures can mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission during casual encounters.

The potential for direct and indirect transmission highlights the importance of implementing IPAC measures across the hierarchy of controls in High-rise Apartment Buildings and High-rise Condominium Buildings including eliminating potential exposures, adjusting residential spaces and processes, and managing potential exposures that cannot be eliminated.

¹ Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Science Brief: SARS-CoV-2 and Surface (Fomite) Transmission for Indoor Community Environments. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/science-and-research/surface-transmission.html>

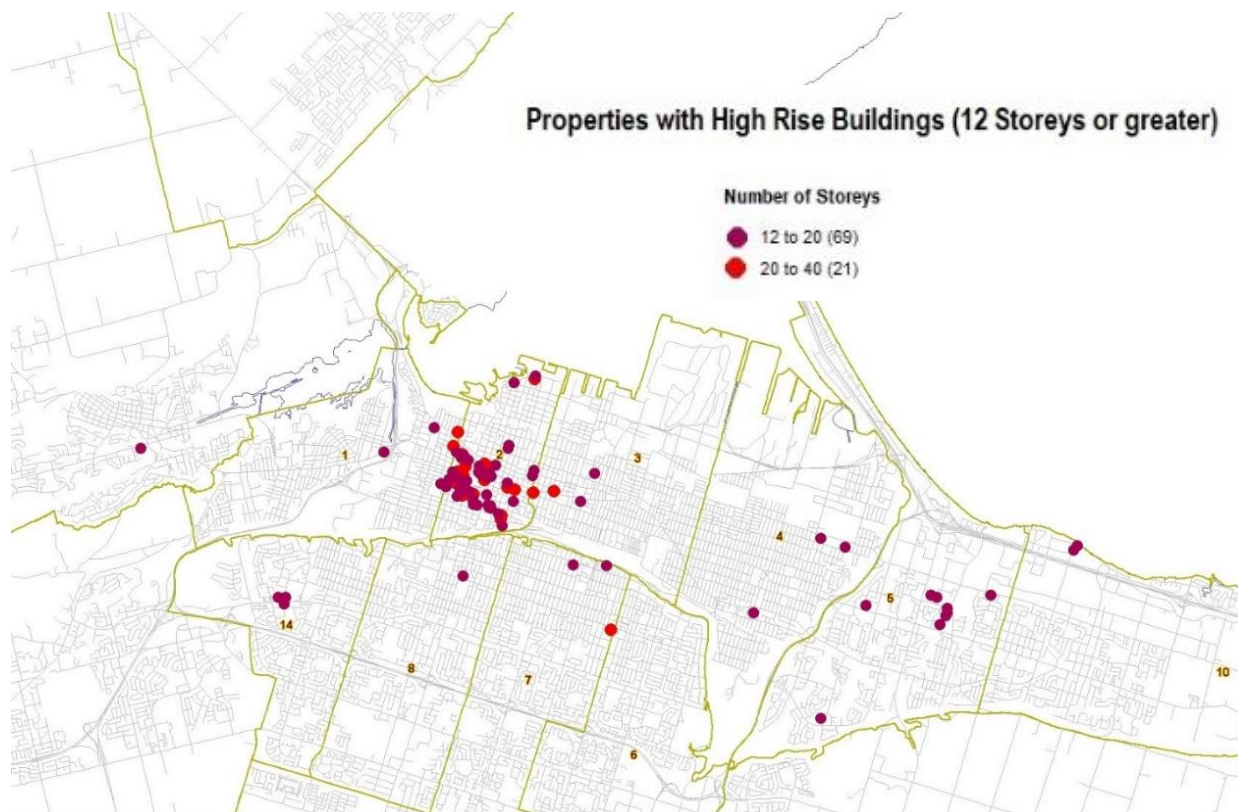
² Eykelbosh, A. (2021). Contextualizing the risks of indirect COVID-19 transmission in multi-unit residential buildings. National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. Retrieved from <https://ncceh.ca/documents/evidence-review/contextualizing-risks-indirect-covid-19-transmission-multi-unit>

Eliminating potential exposures through individual adherence to physical distancing is the most important way to reduce exposure to COVID-19. Encouraging physical distancing through restricting the number of people in an elevator, using floor markings to manage traffic flow, and displaying signs for how to physically distance are effective measures to reduce exposures in common areas. Adjusting building spaces and processes by promoting hand hygiene and cleaning and disinfecting high touch surfaces further reduce the already low risk of transmissibility through surfaces. Potential exposures can be further managed by wearing masks consistently and correctly.¹

Additionally, both residents and buildings owners should comply with the local face covering bylaw and restrictions outlined in the *Reopening Ontario Act (ROA)* (e.g. limitations regarding indoor gatherings and closing of common amenities such as pools). The LOI supplements the *Reopening Ontario Act* and is consistent with the application of IPAC measures across other sectors.

It is staff's understanding that "Multiple Residential Apartment Buildings – Highrise 1 and 2", as outlined in the motion, was meant to apply to High-rise Apartment Buildings with 12 or more storeys and High-rise Condominium Buildings with 12 or more storeys, but would exclude hotels, motels, hospitals, retirement homes and long-term care facilities. Currently, there are approximately 90 High-rise Apartment Buildings and High-rise Condominium Buildings with 12 or more storeys in the City of Hamilton that would meet the definitions above. The greatest concentration of these buildings are in Ward 2 (See Diagram 1 on Page 6).

Diagram 1: Distribution of High-rise Apartment Buildings and High-rise Condominium Buildings with 12 or more Storeys in Hamilton



While the risk of COVID-19 transmission is not unique to High-rise Apartment and High-rise Condominium Buildings, the LOI would require owners of these buildings to develop and implement a COVID-19 safety plan to address IPAC measures known to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, including additional measures not in the original motion, such as promoting physical distancing and ensuring the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system is functioning as intended and maintained as per manufacturer's instructions

Adherence to public health measures are vital to stopping the spread of COVID-19 in our community; however, these measures are second to addressing the systemic risk factors for COVID-19 such as racism, low-income, inadequate housing, unsafe working environments, and unpaid sick leave.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

Not Applicable.

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Healthy and Safe Communities

Hamilton is a safe and supportive City where people are active, healthy, and have a high quality of life.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” to Report BOH21007

Letter of Instruction: High-Risk Apartment Buildings and High-Risk Condominium Buildings in the City of Hamilton