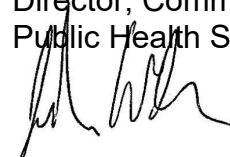




INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Mayor and Members Public Health Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	October 2, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	2023-2024 Respiratory Virus Season Update (BOH23032) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Malcolm Scott (905) 546-2424 Ext. 2265
SUBMITTED BY:	Jordan Walker Director, Communicable Disease Control Division Public Health Services
SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

Not Applicable.

INFORMATION

This report provides information related to Hamilton Public Health Services planned and implemented actions in preparation for the 2023-2024 respiratory virus season. The primary goals of these actions are preventing harm to high-risk persons, reducing transmission within the community, and preserving operational capacity of the health care system. Information covered in this report includes updates to current respiratory virus transmission, indications of the future state of transmission, vaccine program updates, disease control updates, key messages for Hamiltonians, and additional resources that will be updated throughout the 2023-2024 respiratory virus season.

Local Respiratory Virus Transmission

Public Health services will continue to communicate updates on respiratory virus activity in the community throughout the 2023-2024 season. For the most up-to-date statuses, please see the “Additional Respiratory Virus Season Resources” section below.

Indication of Future State of Respiratory Virus Transmission

Current data indicates that the transmission of COVID-19, influenza, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) continue, and Public Health Services anticipates a combined impact of these respiratory pathogens as we enter the winter months. In the southern hemisphere, several countries experienced both increased activity and an earlier start to

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their 2023 respiratory virus season. Although it is uncertain how the 2023-24 season will unfold in Ontario, planning is underway for the anticipated increases in activity and possibility of co-circulation of COVID-19, influenza, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV). The continued threat of these and other respiratory pathogens is likely to cause seasonal pressures on health system resources.

Vaccine Program Updates

For the coming 2023-2024 respiratory season, emphasis will be on provision of seasonal influenza vaccinations at the same time as COVID-19 Fall 2023 doses. Co-administration is considered safe and effective and is strongly recommended. It will be promoted by both the Ministry of Health and locally through Hamilton Public Health Services health promotion channels.

Beginning in early October 2023, the initial prioritization for administration of these vaccines will be those individuals that are at high-risk of severe disease and/or hospitalization from both influenza and COVID-19 infections. This includes:

- Residents and staff of congregate living settings;
- Pregnant Individuals;
- People 65 years of age and older;
- All children 6 months to 4 years of age (based on influenza risk);
- Individuals who are from a First Nation, Inuit or Métis community, and/or who self-identify as First Nation, Inuit, or Métis, and their household members;
- Adults or children 6 months of age and over with chronic health conditions; and,
- Members of racialized and other equity deserving communities.

Health care providers will also be eligible for Fall 2023 boosters of COVID-19 and annual influenza during this initial phase of the roll-out. After vaccines have been allocated and made available for high-risk groups, it is anticipated in the start of November 2023 that eligibility will be opened to the general public.

Subject to availability of vaccine product, Public Health Services will receive seasonal influenza vaccine and Fall 2023 COVID-19 vaccine product from the Ontario Government Pharmacy during the last week of September 2023. Throughout October 2023, COVID-19 and influenza vaccines will begin to be administered through various channels to high-risk groups. Initial allotments of vaccines will be mobilized to our partners in long-term care homes and hospitals. Long-term care homes will self-administer vaccines to their residents, caregivers, and staff, and hospitals will be responsible for their own staff and in-patients. Subsequent vaccine deliveries will be allocated to Public Health Services, and community partner clinics focused on administering to those persons meeting the high-risk criteria. In early October 2023, pharmacies will also start receiving vaccine to offer to the above priority populations and support retirement homes which will vaccinate their residents and staff through on-site clinics operated in partnership with pharmacies.

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Starting in November 2023, influenza and COVID-19 Fall 2023 doses will be available for the general public, primarily through pharmacies. Pharmacies are the key channel for the general public due to the geographic distribution of locations across the City of Hamilton and the reach they offer. Public Health Services' mobile clinics will continue to focus on the provision of COVID-19 vaccination and co-administration with influenza vaccines to equity deserving populations. Mobile clinic locations will be focused in areas of the city that have historically had low uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations and are negatively impacted by social determinants of health. The vaccine program, including the Vaccine Ambassador program, will be working with our City of Hamilton and community partners to identify additional opportunities to provide Fall 2023 respiratory vaccines to high priority populations.

The Vaccine Ambassador program will continue its work during the 2023-2024 respiratory virus season. This program has been essential in reaching populations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic time and assisting them in accessing evidence-based COVID-19 information and addressing other barriers to vaccine access. For the 2023-2024 respiratory virus season, the Vaccine Ambassador program will also add promotion, education, and information regarding seasonal influenza vaccines. This program offers culturally appropriate information in a variety of languages, as well as assistance with booking appointments and accessing transportation to vaccine clinics. Vaccine Ambassadors also work with community partners and organizations to identify opportunities to attend cultural events throughout the fall to promote vaccinations and answer questions about the vaccines. Recent success stories include the Colombian Association Latin Festival, where Ambassadors interacted with 160 individuals, and the Newcomer Health Information and Welcome Session which was attended by approximately 200 individuals. Upcoming plans in Fall 2023 include the Mino Biimadziwin/Wakya'ta'shatse Indigenous Social Event and an event at the Ukrainian Seniors Centre. At these events, the Vaccine Ambassadors will be engaged in health promotion activities around COVID-19 and routine vaccines, offering information about other public health and community services, addressing vaccine hesitancy, and exploring opportunities for COVID-19 vaccine in the community.

Vaccine Ambassadors have recently begun distributing Rapid Antigen Testing Kits in the community and will continue distribution into the 2023-2024 respiratory virus season. To date, over 200 test kits have been distributed. These kits are an important early step in the detection of COVID-19 infection in high-risk individuals so that they can promptly access treatment for COVID-19 infection. In November 2023, the Vaccine Ambassadors will also be hosting a community meeting to engage the community on vaccine related needs and provide up-to-date information in follow-up to a session held in May 2023. The community meeting held in May 2023 provided opportunities for members of the Black African, South Asian, and Latin communities to come together to connect and to provide feedback to the Vaccine Ambassador Team. The Vaccine Ambassador team was able to gain information about where community members

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access trusted information about vaccines, myths and concerns about vaccines, community needs, and the role of the Vaccine Ambassadors. The follow-up meeting planned for November 2023 will be inclusive of additional cultural communities.

Disease Control Updates

In preparation for the 2023-2024 respiratory virus season, Public Health Services has planned and implemented several actions to ensure all residents and higher-risk facilities have the knowledge and tools to prevent the spread of disease. There are three themes to our preparedness: Communication, Collaboration, and Outbreak Preparedness and Management.

Public and Targeted Communications

The general public will continue to receive consistent communications of recommended preventive measures (e.g. staying up-to-date with vaccinations, staying home when sick, etc.) throughout the 2023-2024 respiratory virus season. This will be done through Public Health Services' traditional communication and social media channels. City of Hamilton resources, including the online dashboards for Respiratory Virus Transmission Status, COVID-19 Status of Cases, and COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution will routinely be updated throughout the 2023-2024 respiratory virus season. These resources provide snapshots of respiratory transmission in the community, vaccination distribution, and ongoing respiratory outbreaks in congregate living facilities. This information allows the general public to tailor their preventive measures to both community and individual risk. Partners, including long-term care and retirement home administrators and operators, Hamilton Paramedic Services, Hamilton Health Sciences, and St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton are also directed to these resources to inform their practices. For a complete list of resources, please see the Additional Respiratory Virus Season Resources section below. Additionally, partners, such as Hamilton's four publicly funded school boards, will receive targeted messaging regarding fall preparedness (e.g. staying up-to-date with vaccinations, etc.) for further sharing amongst their communities.

Collaboration with Partners to Ensure Preparedness

To prepare for the 2023-2024 respiratory season, Public Health Services participated in a series of emergency preparedness exercises with health system partners. In August 2023, Public Health Services partnered with Ontario Health West to facilitate a respiratory exercise that aimed to: affirm roles and responsibilities related to respiratory virus season preparedness and response; identify gaps in readiness planning to mitigate risks ahead of the respiratory virus season; and, clarify coordination and communication mechanisms. The exercise included local leaders from the health sector including Ontario Health, long-term care homes, hospital laboratories, Hamilton Health Sciences, St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, City of Hamilton Emergency Management, Infection Prevention and Control Hub, and Home and Community Care. Public Health Services has participated in two additional preparedness exercises – the first led by Ontario Health and the Ministry of Health focused on paediatric respiratory virus season

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readiness provincially, and the other facilitated by McMaster Children's Hospital focused on surge readiness and collaborative planning in Hamilton.

Fall Education Sessions are planned for October 2023 with administrators and operators of Hamilton's long-term care, retirement homes, and other congregate living settings to support their respective facilities' preparedness. These sessions are being designed with input from the long-term care and retirement home community to ensure it meets their unique needs. The most up-to-date setting-specific guidance, COVID-19 and influenza vaccine rollout timelines, and outbreak management protocols, measures, and processes will be reviewed. This year's iteration will also feature table-top outbreak preparedness simulations designed and adapted by Public Health Services. These simulations will provide operators and administrators hands-on experience with managing outbreaks to translate knowledge and build confidence to take appropriate actions during respiratory outbreaks.

Public Health Services staff are also working jointly with the local Infection Prevention and Control Hub, a team of infection control professionals from Hamilton Health Sciences and St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, to ensure congregate living settings are prepared this respiratory virus season. Public Health Services is responsible for declaring outbreaks and supporting outbreak management, and the Infection Prevention and Control Hub is dedicated to building capacity within congregate living settings through the provision of high-quality infection prevention and control support. Jointly, Public Health Services and the Hamilton Infection Prevention and Control Hub have a shared goal to advise settings on outbreak prevention and preparedness for managing cases, contacts, and outbreaks, in conjunction with advice provided through the Ministry of Health, other relevant Ministries, and infection control best practices to mitigate morbidity and mortality in settings that serve vulnerable populations. This goal is accomplished through the provision of training, education, guidance, and resources to staff and caregivers. The Infection Prevention and Control Hub additionally provides proactive on-site preparedness assessments and can assist with routine infection control audits.

Outbreak Preparedness and Management

Higher-risk settings, such as long-term care homes and retirement homes, will continue to be supported in managing outbreaks within their facilities. Public Health Services will consult with and direct congregate living settings on outbreak prevention, preparedness, and management for managing cases, contacts and outbreaks, in conjunction with advice provided through the Ministry of Health and other relevant Ministries. Guidance and recommendations will be provided regarding infection prevention and control measures to prevent outbreaks and control the spread of disease within facilities in outbreak. Staff will use data to monitor the progression of active outbreaks to ensure that implemented measures are working effectively and the spread of disease has been curtailed. Public Health Services will collaborate with and make referrals to the local

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Infection Prevention and Control Hub to ensure infection control practices are aligned with Ministry Guidance and infection control best practices. Referrals can lead to both proactive on-site assessments to evaluate preparedness and routine infection control practices, and reactive on-site assessments in response to outbreak management to assess the implementation of infection control measures.

Key Messages

Hamiltonians are recommended to take a multi-layered approach this respiratory virus season to prevent the spread of diseases and to reduce serious health outcomes. This includes:

- Staying up-to-date with vaccinations including COVID-19 and influenza;
- Screening for respiratory symptoms daily and staying home when sick;
- Practicing good hand and respiratory hygiene (e.g. handwashing, covering mouth when sneezing or coughing, etc.);
- Speaking with a health care provider about treatments for COVID-19, influenza, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV); and,
- Hamiltonians can also consider wearing a tight-fitting, well-constructed mask in indoor public settings, especially anyone at higher risk of severe infection.

Additional Respiratory Virus Season Resources

For the most up-to-date information regarding transmission of respiratory viruses in the community, vaccine distribution, and ongoing outbreaks in higher-risk settings, please see the list of resources below. These resources will be routinely updated at the intervals indicated below to ensure the general public can make the most informed decisions this respiratory virus season.

- Respiratory Virus Transmission Status Dashboard – Updated Wednesdays
 - <https://www.hamilton.ca/people-programs/public-health/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-covid/covid-19-data#transmission-status>
- Influenza and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Dashboard – Updated Tuesdays
 - <https://www.hamilton.ca/people-programs/public-health/diseases-conditions/influenza-flu>
- COVID-19 Status of Cases Dashboard – Updated Tuesdays
 - <https://www.hamilton.ca/people-programs/public-health/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-covid/covid-19-data#status-of-cases>
- COVID-19 Vaccine Dashboard – Updated Tuesdays
 - <https://www.hamilton.ca/people-programs/public-health/diseases-conditions/coronavirus-covid/covid-19-data#vaccine-distribution>
- Active Outbreaks on Open Data – Updated Monday to Friday
 - https://data-spatialsolutions.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/93c3500fbc241358a13cf21409dfad6_4/about

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Not Applicable.