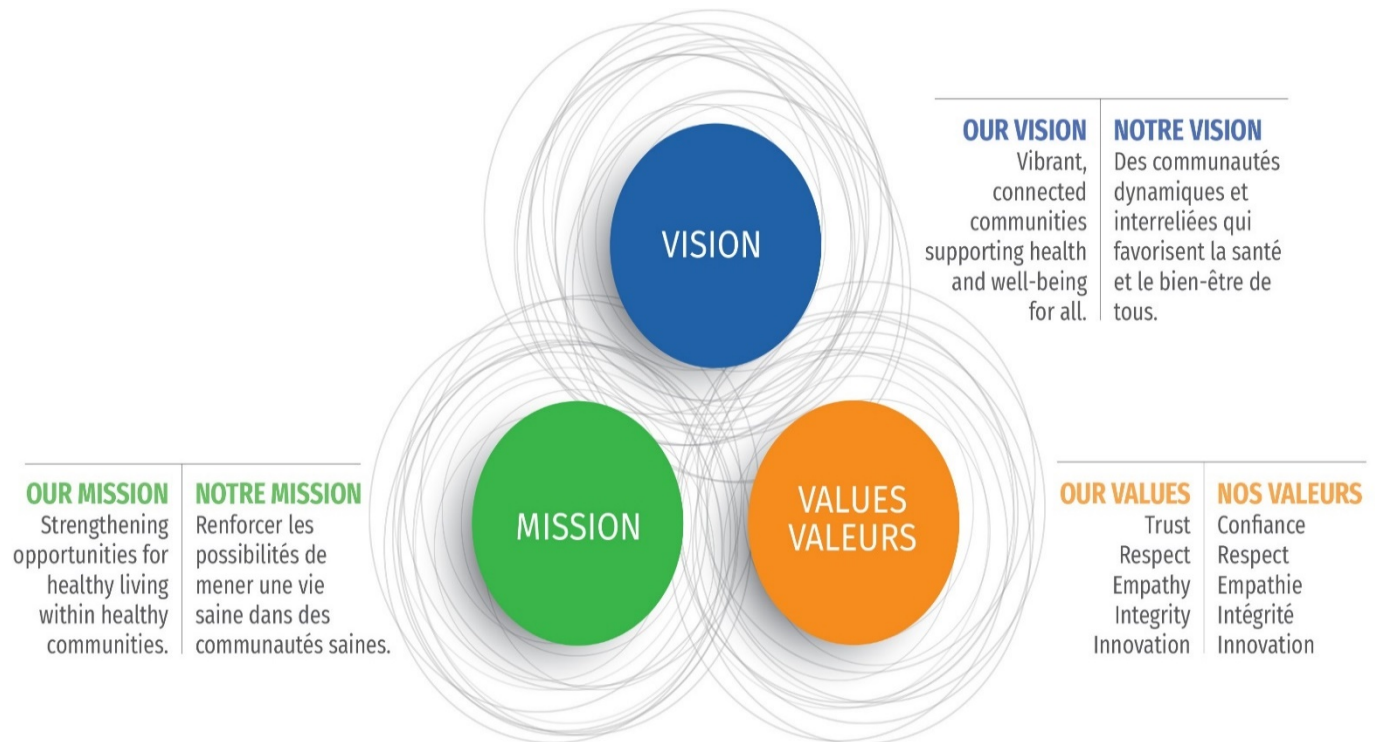


PORCUPINE HEALTH UNIT

Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board of Health



We Are Public Health - Nous sommes la santé publique
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Prepared by:
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Medical Officer of Health/Chief Executive Officer
February 3, 2022

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE

Porcupine Health Unit Status

*This table was updated on **Thursday, February 3, 2022, at 12:00 p.m.***

Total Tests Completed*	149,872
Number of cases**	4,420
Active cases	385
Out of region cases	0
Recovered	3,994
Deceased	41

**Of which PHU is aware. Data has a 2-day lag and is extracted from the Ministry of Health VA Tool.*

***Number of confirmed cases, to date, including active, out of region, and resolved.*

****Number of recovered cases plus the number of deceased cases.*

Testing data includes testing from community assessment centres and other health care settings, as well as targeted surveillance initiatives, such as in long-term care homes. Data is current with a 2-day lag.

Though the PHU is no longer reporting all the cases across the region, due to provincial testing guidance changes, the region continues to see significant case counts compared to earlier in the Pandemic. The PHU has reported 4,420 cases to date and despite the decrease in testing there has been significant numbers with 1,275 cases since January 1st, 2022. Currently the PHU is reporting 385 active cases. Tragically, the PHU have reported several deaths over the last month and it is hopeful that continued uptake in vaccination will prevent further losses. The PHU population includes many at risk for poor outcomes from COVID-19.

The extensive work required of the Porcupine Health Unit team, requires significant contributions of temporary and part time staff as well as partnerships with community members and community partners, as well as significant ongoing overtime to respond to the Pandemic.

The PHU continues to conduct outbreak prevention and management in highest risk settings. The PHU has issued outbreak declarations and currently supports the management of outbreak at 3 long term care homes (LTCH) 1 retirement home (RH), 2 acute care settings, and 2 congregate living settings (includes shelters and group homes as examples) 2022 alone, twelve outbreaks have been declared in the PHU region, which requires ongoing significant staff capacity to support these highest risk settings.

Omicron is the dominant strain in Ontario and the PHU region is following the trend. Despite the fact they are not testing all the samples for this variant, it is reported that that over 90% of the samples province wide are Omicron. The Omicron strain is less severe in nature, and vaccine is reducing ICU admits and deaths, however, three doses are needed to prevent an asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic infection.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

PHU COVID-19 RESPONSE (cont'd)

Porcupine Health Unit Status (cont'd)

The positivity rate across the PHU has increased, however the infection rate has decreased from 712 per 100,000 to 237 per 100,000 from end of December to end of January. The PHU has made some changes to the epidemiological reports that align with the provincial measures. The epidemiology report will be moving to focus on hospitalization rates and outbreaks as opposed to case numbers as they are no longer indicative of cases in the community.

The PHU team continues to work 7 days a week to protect communities and especially those more vulnerable to COVID-19. There has been growing around vaccine mandates and public health measures. The PHU trajectory has been different than many other jurisdictions. Looking at the cases, at the region's health care capacity, the infection rate along with vaccine rates, it is evident that the public health measures have made a difference for the PHU region because they have slowed this wave to a point where the population are not overwhelming the ICUs and the acute care system. A continuation of the layers of protection remains critical to protect the health care and other sector capacities and to protect the most vulnerable.

Omicron cases are expected to be present for some time and the PHU numbers have not likely not peaked yet, so ongoing vigilance remains critical. Omicron has been mild for most of the population, but it will not be mild for everyone as is witnessed with hospitalization rates and tragic deaths. Besides vaccine, ensuring proper mask use, screening for symptoms at work, school, and play, and staying home when they have symptoms, no matter how mild.

With changes in provincial guidance for testing and case and contact management (CCM), community members are advised to follow the algorithms on the PHU website to determine whether they need to test or isolate, and how to advise their contacts. There are resources to support cases and contacts, as public health is only doing CCM in highest risk settings. Higher case rates in acute care hospitals, LTCH/RH, and congregate living settings occur because of high community rates. Promotion of the measures in communities, in settings such as restaurants, malls and grocery stores make a difference and remain important. The PHU continue to ask for municipal leadership support to ensure that these measures are being followed every day to protect the most vulnerable settings.

Vaccine Update

The PHU team continues to provide innovative opportunities for access to vaccine across the region for first second, third doses, and now fourth doses for those who are most vulnerable. The vaccine program has done an amazing job with over 170,000 doses administered across the PHU region. Tremendous partner support across the region, including primary care, hospitals, pharmacies, EMS, LTCH/RH, and municipalities has been key to the success of the COVID vaccine program. The vast majority of vaccine has been administered at PHU led clinics. The team continues to work in collaboration with communities to identify individuals, and neighbourhoods that may be at increased risk for poor outcomes from COVID and at greater risk in finding access to vaccine. The PHU continues to work with shelters and other community partners to ensure access for those who may be

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

Porcupine Health Unit Status (cont'd)

Vaccine Update (cont'd)

more vulnerable to COVID-19. Collaborations are ongoing to support all the LTCH/RH to get third doses to their staff as mandated by the Ministry, as well as getting fourth doses for residents.

To date 171,598 vaccines have been administered in the PHU region. From December 20, 2021 to January 10, 2022, efforts to increase vaccine rates to reduce the impact of the omicron variant on the region, led to a significant number of the entire PHU population receiving either a first, second or third dose. Vaccine rates of first doses for the 5–11-year-old age band is 47.7% which is under the Provincial average. The PHU team are working arduously, in collaboration with school boards, to increase this rate as is the rest of the Province. The PHU is offering clinics at schools across the region during school hours as well as after school to provide access opportunities to vaccination. Second doses for those over the age of 5 are 80.4% and third doses 5+ age band are 42.9%. Regionally, it is known that rates in the older population are better, but it is imperative that the region sees an increase in third dose rates across all age groups. The PHU continues to ensure opportunities for first and second and third doses.

ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS

While the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic and now the vaccine program continues to demand increasing PHU staff resources, the PHU team is also responding to other urgent and emergent public health protection issues and work continues in other public health programs.

Opioid Response

The Opioid Crisis has required another concurrent emergency response across the Porcupine region. The PHU continues to dedicate staff not only to the comprehensive drug strategy program but looking at the urgent health needs site in Timmins. An application has been submitted in partnerships with Timmins District Hospital, the City of Timmins and other community partners. Next steps will involve a site visit from Health Canada as part of the review of the application process. In December, the PHU provided a presentation, along with TDH, and Timmins Police to the Timmins BIA, with 50 BIA members in attendance. The PHU has also been fortunate to receive a base funding enhancement in the Harm Reduction Outreach Program for the AIDS and Hep C programs from the Ministry of Health and AIDS bureau funding program. This is incredibly important in supporting PHU's response, and communities across the region. This additional funding will permit the hiring of an additional full time permanent staff to provide additional support to the Outreach Team. Funding will also be utilized to purchase a vehicle for the outreach program to support expansion of outreach services across the region.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

ONTARIO PUBLIC HEALTH STANDARDS (cont'd)

Opioid Response (cont'd)

The outreach team has provided support for the COVID isolation Centre Timmins. The PHU has been able to provide vaccine clinics, address concerns with respect to substance use, provide Naloxone kits, provide harm reduction messaging, and support case and contact management

The Opioid emergency continues to be a concerning trend across the region. It requires a multi-disciplinary and comprehensive approach, and this work will continue into the next few years to address impacts that are expected as a result of the pandemic.

Dental

The Dental team has done extremely well with the Ontario Senior's Dental Program (OSDP). Strong partnership between the Dental team and Specialists has provided support to seniors across the region. The PHU had 858 eligible seniors. There are currently 204 seniors enrolled who are accessing dental services. In 2021, 508 claims were submitted for support of 113 denture and partials (Appendix A). The PHU is continuing to look at the expansion of this program with a request for additional funding.

Environmental Health

The PHU continues to support many investigations that are not as public in terms of other reportable diseases. Ongoing work in collaboration with First Nation communities Indigenous Services Canada, Provincial and Federal Partners to provide significant support to a blastomycosis outbreak as well as COVID outbreaks. COVID has put a significant strain on the team, yet despite all this work, they have been able to complete 100% of high-risk food setting inspections, despite limited capacity and vast region.

Immunization

With respect to other immunizations, the PHU continues to support the COVID vaccines but provides opportunities for other primary series of vaccine. Plans are underway to return to the High schools to resume the regular vaccine program and to catch up on regular vaccine program backlog.

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UPDATE

Human Resources

The PHU continues to hire many team members across the region due to retirements and resignations, and there continues to be high turnover. The PHU continues to look at opportunities with planning the recovery of public health programs and getting back to the work required. Staff have been through a tremendous amount of upheaval and constant pivoting to respond to the pandemic and the needs of communities and continue to do it with dedication, and expertise. It is hopeful that PHU staff, to support their health and wellbeing, will soon resume their roles. Ensuring adequate staff for the significant response continues to be a challenge.

Porcupine Health Unit Staffing Changes Update January 31, 2022

Hiring

Permanent positions:

- 2 Public Health Nurses promoted to Program Coordinator positions – Healthy Babies, Healthy Children and Health and Well-Being.

Temporary positions:

- Administrative Assistant, Timmins – 3 temporary full-time
- Immunizers (RNs, RPNs, Nsg Students) – 14
- Covid Response Vaccine Clinic Assistants– 9
- Public Health Students – An additional 11 Students who had either worked during the summer or were new, worked 3-4 weeks over their Christmas break filling many shifts at clinics and in CCM.

Resignations:

- Public Health Inspector, Timmins – January 28, 2022
- 2 - Covid Response Assistants, Timmins, Part-Time – December 2022
- Administrative Assistant, Timmins – December 1, 2022
- Speech Language Assistant, Timmins – February 4, 2022

Retirements:

- Program Coordinator Health & Well-Being – Jan 31, 2022
- Management Assistant - March 31, 2022
- Human Resources Officer – April 13, 2022
- Public Health Nurse, Kapuskasing - March 31, 2022

Respectfully Submitted,
Lianne Catton, M.D., CCFP-EM, MPH
Medical Officer of Health/Chief Executive Officer
Porcupine Health Unit