

Region of Waterloo
Public Health and Paramedic Services
Infectious Disease

To: Community and Health Services Committee
Meeting Date: October 8, 2024
Report Title: Waterloo Region Fall & Winter Seasonal Illness Report 2023-2024

1. Recommendation

For information.

2. Purpose / Issue:

To provide an update for Regional Council as the Board of Health on reported cases and institutional outbreaks of common pathogens during the 2023/2024 respiratory and gastrointestinal illness season, as well as information on vaccine distribution and administration.

3. Strategic Plan:

This report relates to the following strategic priority: Equitable Services and Opportunities of the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. Public Health promotes immunization against influenza, COVID-19 and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), and responds to institutional disease outbreaks to protect our most vulnerable residents.

4. Report Highlights:

- Public Health observed an expected increase in influenza, COVID-19, RSV, and invasive Group A Streptococcal disease (iGAS) activity in Waterloo Region during the 2023/24 respiratory illness season.
- Public Health collaborates with the Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Hub and Ontario Health West to help long-term care homes, retirement homes and congregate living settings prepare for the season ahead. During the 2023/2024 season, Public Health managed 211 respiratory outbreaks and 99 gastrointestinal outbreaks in institutions, congregate living settings and childcare settings in Waterloo Region.
- Beginning in 2023, Public Health was given the added responsibility of providing RSV vaccines and information to long-term care homes, retirement homes,

hospitals, and primary care providers. Public Health now supports long-term care and retirement homes with vaccine distribution, as well as the provision of onsite vaccination clinics, when required. This has resulted in reallocating human health resources to coordinate and successfully immunize high-risk older adults.

5. Background:

Public Health conducts surveillance of key pathogens expected to increase in circulation during the fall and winter months, including influenza, COVID-19, RSV, Group A Streptococcus and some gastrointestinal viruses. COVID-19 and RSV cases are only reportable to Public Health in the event of an outbreak in institutional and congregate living settings. Public Health also monitors and supports the management of respiratory and gastrointestinal outbreaks in institutions and congregate living settings.

Public Health's role in the distribution and administration of available vaccines is central to reducing disease severity, hospitalizations and deaths, particularly among those at highest risk.

Respiratory Pathogens

- During the 2023/2024 season, there were 726 cases and 2 local influenza-related deaths reported in Waterloo Region (Table 1, Appendix A).
- COVID-19 data is reported by calendar year. In 2023, there were 5,043 lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 43 COVID-19 related deaths (Table 1, Appendix B).
- There were 77 lab-confirmed cases of Invasive Group A Streptococcal disease (iGAS) and 8 related deaths during the 2023/2024 season (Table 1, Appendix C).

Respiratory and Gastrointestinal Outbreaks

- Waterloo Region experienced a surge in respiratory outbreaks from mid-September 2023 to early January 2024, consistent with expected seasonal patterns. During the 2023/2024 season, Public Health managed 211 respiratory outbreaks in institutions and congregate living settings in Waterloo Region. The majority of these outbreaks (73%) were attributed to COVID-19 (Table 1, Appendix D).
- During the 2023/2024 season, Public Health managed 99 gastrointestinal outbreaks. While gastrointestinal outbreaks often do not have a known pathogen, norovirus is the most commonly identified pathogen associated with outbreaks. Most gastrointestinal outbreaks (81%) were reported in childcare settings (Table 2,

Appendix D).

Vaccine Distribution

- During the 2023/2024 season, Public Health distributed 92,062 influenza vaccine doses to pharmacies and 70,220 doses to local healthcare providers
- In 2023, Waterloo Region pharmacies administered 106,136 doses of COVID-19 vaccine. Local healthcare providers administered another 3,696 doses, and 23,652 doses were administered at Public Health clinics (Table 3, Appendix B).
- In 2023, Public Health administered 340 of doses of RSV vaccine to residents of long-term care homes, retirement homes or elder care lodges. An additional 936 doses were distributed to these settings for healthcare provider administration.
- Public Health will be distributing RSV vaccines from the province to healthcare partners and supporting its administration to higher-risk populations, including:
 - Those over 60 years of age with certain risk factors, including those living in long-term care homes, retirement homes or elder care lodges.
 - Infants born during RSV season (typically November to April), those born in 2024 but prior to the RSV season, and those under 2 years of age with high-risk conditions
 - Pregnant women who are 32-36 weeks pregnant and will give birth during this year's RSV season.

6. Financial Implications:

- The staffing and associated costs to deliver these programs are covered through the 2024 approved, cost-shared Mandatory Programs budget of \$24.4M. This program is cost-shared between the Province of Ontario and the Region of Waterloo. While the traditional Provincial cost share level was “up to 75%”, provincial funding restrictions over several years have resulted in a current provincial cost-sharing level of approximately 68% (based on the Region's 2024 Budget). This represents a Provincial funding shortfall of \$2.5 million across all Public Health programs.
- Public Health continues to receive \$5.00 per dose in cost recovery from the province for the direct delivery of influenza vaccine. This fee has remained unchanged since the beginning of the Universal Influenza Immunization Program in 2000.
- For the period January 1, 2024, to March 31, 2024, we have received up to

\$200,000 in one-time funding for the COVID-19 Vaccine program. After March 31st, COVID vaccine related expenses are to be absorbed within the mandatory cost-share budget. Starting January 1, 2024, COVID-19 Outbreak program budgets are to be cost-shared with the province. With the potential opportunity for some additional one-time 100% Ministry funding to support these COVID-19 or RSV programs, we are forecasting one-time budgets to manage surge or higher-level response.

7. Conclusion / Next Steps:

Public Health protects Waterloo Region residents during the respiratory illness season by working with partners and institutions to prevent and control disease outbreaks, and by providing and administering influenza, COVID-19 and RSV vaccines, particularly for those at highest risk of severe disease.

8. Attachments:

Appendix A: Influenza Data

Appendix B: COVID-19 Data

Appendix C: Invasive Group A Streptococcal disease (iGAS) Data

Appendix D: Respiratory and Gastrointestinal Outbreaks Data

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