



Renfrew County and District Health Unit
"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"

Memorandum

Date: February 24, 2022

To: Renfrew County and District Residents

Re: Growing sense of optimism, but the beginning of the end is not the end

There is finally a growing sense of optimism as we approach the two-year mark of the pandemic. Omicron seems to be leaving as quickly as it arrived, and all the important health indicators are improving quickly.

The month of March is a week away and there will be a significant reduction in public health prevention measures and social restrictions, most importantly suspending proof of vaccination requirements in several settings.

We have worked hard to keep COVID-19 at bay during a long and taxing winter. It is fair to say that we are all tired, and we need to get back to a new normal.

However, we need to remind ourselves that the beginning of the end, is not the end. We still need to remain cautious throughout the month of March. The situation in Renfrew County tends to lag the urban centres in Ontario by 2 to 3 weeks. Our numbers for outbreaks, hospitalizations, and deaths have started to come down but are still too high.

In Pembroke, the wastewater concentration of COVID-19, an excellent indicator of community levels of infection, is one of the highest in Ontario. There is still progress to be made, and we do not want to go backwards.

This means that we must continue to be vigilant and act with caution. Experience now shows that unlike many other diseases, immunity for COVID-19 whether it be from vaccines or from direct infection from the disease, is not long lived. This means that residents should take advantage of additional vaccines and get every dose for which they are eligible. This means 3 doses for anyone over the age of 12, and 4 doses for residents in congregate care settings and] those who are immunocompromised. For children 5-11 years of age, we have yet to reach 50% for first doses and this is a concern.

Masking, distancing, and hand hygiene continue to be important prevention

strategies. Masks can reduce transmission by 50 to 80% and distancing provides added benefit. While many of us want to remove our masks now, it is too early, and we must patiently and respectfully await provincial guidance. Many may choose to keep masking for months and even years. This will require tolerance, patience, and kindness on the part of everyone.

Equally important is the size of social groupings. There is still plenty of Omicron in the community and winter is not over. This means that we need to be extra careful in indoor settings. Carefree activities in large groups are to be discouraged. These large gatherings increase the risk of, "super spreading", which can reverse progress quickly. The best way to prevent this is another month of vigilance when it comes to social groupings.

We are getting closer to a new normal, but because Renfrew County and District tends to be 2 to 3 weeks behind the urban centres, we need to be extra careful in the upcoming weeks. The rewards will be great, so I urge you to be patient and to keep up the good work.

Sincerely,



Dr. Robert Cushman
Acting Medical Officer of Health
Renfrew County and District Health Unit