

Media Advisory

Updated Report on the Spread of COVID-19 in Non-Health Care Workplaces Shows Huge Growth in Manufacturing, Schools, Construction and Retail

Toronto-- It is evident that the “lockdowns” in hotspots and measures in most Public Health Unit regions have been inadequate to stem the spread of COVID-19 and the numbers are alarming, according to a new tracking report released today by the Ontario Health Coalition here: <https://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/report-covid-19-outbreaks-in-non-healthcare-settings-data-updated-to-december-2/>

The numbers released by Public Health Ontario only tell part of the story, says the Coalition, and vital information is not being reported to the public. In our last report during the week of November 14, 35.4% of COVID-19 cases had not been traced back to an exposure source. For the week of November 28, 36.7% of cases have been traced back to their source. Public Health is not reporting how many cases are not contact traced at all. The City of Toronto cancelled contact tracing for all except “high risk” cases and as of today Windsor Public Health has joined suit, saying, like Toronto that they are overwhelmed. The failure of the province to provide resources to ensure contact tracing and quarantining means that a very significant proportion of the spread of the virus is not controlled.

Public Health Ontario reports a 22.1% increase in cases during the two-week period from November 18th - December 2nd, a rolling 7-day average of 1,795 cases per day and a provincial test positivity rate of 3.9% during the week of November 22nd- November 28th, in which two neighbourhoods in Toronto and York have positivity rates above 20% and 27 areas in Peel, Toronto, York, Durham, Waterloo and Windsor have positivity rates above 10%. The Public Health Units with the highest test positivity rates are: Peel 10.3%, Toronto 6.0%, York 5.7%, Windsor-Essex 4.3%, Waterloo 3.9%, Durham 3.7%, Hamilton 3.4% and Halton 3.3%.

The increase in non-health care workplaces now far outpace the spread in the general public, increasing 26.64% in the same two weeks. Public Health’s numbers do not include all school cases, however (due to their narrow definition of “outbreak” in schools). In actuality, there are now 5,146 total cases in students and staff reported by the province of Ontario, which indicates a 41.1% increase in two weeks from November 18th to December 2nd.

Including the actual numbers in schools, the Ontario Health Coalition calculates that there has been an increase of 24.93% in cases in non-health care workplaces (including schools) over the most recent two-week period captured in this report, including all cases in schools and day care settings.

The largest increase in cases in this report was from the manufacturing sector as the spread of the novel coronavirus grew by 76.68% in two weeks. In manufacturing there have been a number of large outbreaks and an increasing number of outbreaks in areas that previously had low test positivity rates.

Retail outbreaks have continued to grow in severity and frequency, a 29.38% increase since our last report and have spread as far north as Sudbury.

Cases in outbreaks among Public Service workplaces like transit, LCBO, Service Ontario and Utilities have risen 23.24% and cases in construction have also risen 25%.

While it has been impossible to find systematic province-wide information for workplace outbreaks due to the lack of transparent reporting in most Public Health Units, there have been significant improvements during this report. Brant County and Hamilton Public Health Units are now reporting the names of businesses and cases associated with all outbreaks. Hastings-Prince Edward and Timiskaming are reporting names of businesses only when necessary to properly contact trace the outbreak and Peel and Waterloo are revealing case numbers and industries but not the business names. All other Public Health Units are not reporting any information beyond health care, though some report congregate care settings and Windsor-Essex and Chatham-Kent report agricultural outbreaks. Toronto is among the least transparent in their reporting, only reporting hospitals, long-term care, retirement homes and homeless shelters.

In order to control the spread of this virus, Public Health Units must be given the resources to be able to contact trace COVID-19 cases and all those exposed must self-isolate or quarantine. The public needs to know what businesses are a source of potential exposure so that Ontarians can make informed decisions as well as know when to get tested or contact their local Public Health Unit. Instead of providing this, the Ford government seems to be intent on loosening requirements for quarantining after international travel and sitting idle while waiting for a vaccine.