



Updated Report on the Spread of COVID-19 in Workplaces (excluding Health Care) and Schools Shows Huge Growth in Schools, Construction, Retail/Restaurants/Entertainment and Public Services

Toronto -- As Ontario has introduced new measures to try to minimize the spread of COVID-19 with Peel and Toronto entering lockdown and Hamilton, Waterloo, Durham, Halton and York enforcing stricter regulations, it is important to evaluate the spread of the disease in workplaces and schools in the weeks leading up to the lockdown on November 23. The Ontario Health Coalition has released a new report today looking at outbreaks in non-health care settings through the first three weeks of November accessible here: <https://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/report-covid-19-outbreaks-in-non-healthcare-settings-data-updated-to-november-18/>. In this period (October 31 to November 18) the spread of COVID-19 significantly worsened. The number of people infected in workplace outbreaks far exceeds the general community spread of the virus in the following workplace sectors: construction; schools and daycares; retail, restaurants and entertainment; and public services.

Ontario's previous record has been broken and we are now seeing the highest rate of COVID-19 spread ever. For the week of November 18th, the rolling average is sitting at 1,369 per day. Here are the key trends:

Due to the way that the provincial government has chosen to define school outbreaks, Public Health has reported an 18% increase in cases in workplaces (excluding health care settings) during this time period. However, that percentage only included an increase of 573 cases (for a cumulative total to date of 843) among schools and childcare settings (as per their definition of outbreak). The province's tracking of actual cases in schools shows an increase of 1865 cases (for a cumulative total to date of 4,265 cases) among students and education workers as well 639 cases in childcare settings in this period. Using the increase in the total numbers in schools, we calculate a 39.74% increase of cases in non-health care industries overall in this three-week period (October 31 – November 18).

Among the highest growth rates in COVID-positive cases we found in workplaces, there was a large outbreak in a construction site in Waterloo, which increased the relatively small number of cases we had tracked in construction by 220%.

Aside from this, the biggest growth in cases is in schools and childcare settings where they increased 86.9%; followed by retail, restaurants and entertainment which increased 71.65%; and public services which increased 39.14%.

As of the publication of this report, the province and most local Public Health Units are still not reporting the names of businesses with outbreaks.

Additionally, Ontario's Premier Doug Ford has also announced that he plans on pushing the federal government to lift the requirement for two-week quarantine after international travel, stating that he would go forward with implementing a replacement protocol if he is unable to get support from Prime Minister Trudeau. It is important to note that 80% of travellers who have entered Canada have been exempt from the two-week quarantine as exemptions were made for truck drivers, emergency response personnel and flight services. International travel was the cause of significant spread at the beginning of the pandemic and resulted in the deaths of 10 airport limo drivers, among others. There is no publicly available tracking of the impact of international travel on the spread of COVID-19.

The lack of clear, accessible public data on where transmission is occurring continues to be a problem but the Institute of Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) has released a very useful COVID-19 Dashboard where Ontarians in some regions

can search their postal codes test positivity and testing rate, here : <https://www.ices.on.ca/DAS/AHRQ/COVID-19-Dashboard>. As of November 25, they report that the Public Health Units with the highest percent positivity rates are: Peel (10.2%), Toronto (6%), York (5.8%), Windsor-Essex (4%), Halton (3.6%), Waterloo (3.5%) and Durham (3.3%). They have also shown that there is a significant variance among neighbourhoods, with four postal codes in Peel and three in Toronto with 15-20 % test positivity¹. To put this into perspective, New York, which was one of the worst hit areas in North America during the first wave, has seen positivity rates in the 2.5-3% range and in keeping with international standards, if the positivity rate exceeds the tipping point of 3%, New York will close schools, go into virtual learning and be in lockdown.²

During the week of November 18, 35.4%³ of COVID-19 cases had not been traced back to a source. These unknown exposure sources have been increasing during the second wave as Public Health Units in hotspots have been unable to keep up with contact tracing. Severe backlogs in testing and contact tracing are continuing.

We are calling on the Ford government to give Public Health adequate resources to contact trace and quarantine effectively and to provide transparent reporting so that Ontarians can make informed decisions about their health.

¹ IC/ES. COVID-19 Dashboard. November 25 2020 <https://www.ices.on.ca/DAS/AHRQ/COVID-19-Dashboard>

² Millman Jennifer. NYC on Verge of 'Full-Blown' 2nd Wave as Positivity Rate Nears School Shutdown Mark. November 10 2020 <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/coronavirus/this-is-our-last-chance-nyc-mayors-pleas-to-stop-2nd-wave-avoid-new-closures-grow-urgent/2714495/>

³ Epidemiological Summary. Public Health Ontario. November 18 2020. <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/epi/covid-19-weekly-epi-summary-report.pdf?la=en>