

MEDIA RELEASE

Friday, December 17, 2021

Local Health Unit Asks Employers to Help Address Surge in Cases

With a spike in local cases of COVID-19, the health unit is encouraging employers to put measures in place to help prevent further spread of the virus.

Today, the province announced a number of new capacity limits, including limiting indoor gatherings to 10 people (from previous 25), outdoor gathering limits lowered to 25 people (from 100), and capacity limits at most indoor settings across province (including restaurants, bars, personal care services, retailers, shopping malls) are set at 50 per cent. This does not apply to a business or space that is used for a wedding/funeral/religious service. These limits come into effect at 12:01 am on December 19, 2021.

To supplement the provincial announcement, the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit today sent a letter to local employers asking them to take additional steps within their businesses. In the past 14 days, there have been 126 cases confirmed within the Health Unit's region.

"I am worried that we are already seeing a surge of cases in advance of the holiday season" says Dr. Natalie Bocking, Medical Officer of Health for the HKPR District Health Unit. "Our goal is to reduce the number of people working in close proximity to help halt any further spread. Broad measures are required as there is no one sector that is causing this sharp increase in local cases."

In her letter to employers, Dr. Bocking recommends that all employers:

- Move all employees to work remotely, unless their work requires them to be on-site at the workplace.
- Limit all onsite interactions. This includes conducting meetings virtually, when feasible to do so.

If staff must work onsite, the employer should:

- Actively screen employees for symptoms of COVID-19 and refer for testing any employee that screens positive.
- Ensure that workers are physically distanced by at least 2 metres when at their workstations or separated by physical barriers.
- Wear tightly fitting masks if they cannot be physically distanced while working or when moving throughout the workplace.
- Stagger lunches and breaks to maximize distance and minimize interactions.
- Ensure that lunchrooms and break areas are arranged and posted with a maximum occupancy to maintain physical distance between employees using the spaces while eating and drinking.

"While these measures will not stop an upcoming omicron surge, the goal is to interrupt and slow down transmission of the virus as much as possible," Dr. Bocking says. "We need to work together to prevent severe illness from COVID and protect our health care system from further strain."