

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Wednesday, December 15, 2021**

### **Health Unit Notified of Potential Local Case of Omicron Variant**

The Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit has been notified that initial screening of a local resident who has COVID has shown the person has the markers consistent with the Omicron variant.

Although Omicron has not yet been confirmed in this individual, Dr. Natalie Bocking, Medical Officer of Health for the HKPR District Health Unit says this screening means it is “highly likely” that this is an Omicron variant infection. This individual lives in Northumberland County, making this the first potential case of Omicron identified in a resident of the Health Unit’s region.

Under provincial protocols, all COVID-19 tests are now screened for the Omicron variant. Health Units are notified if the initial screening identifies any of the markers for the variant. Like all confirmed cases of COVID-19, this individual has been contacted by Health Unit staff and is isolating. As well, any potential high-risk contacts are being notified.

To protect the privacy of all individuals, the Health Unit will not provide any additional information about this, or any case of COVID-19.

“The confirmation that the Omicron variant has been detected in our area is not unexpected given we have seen cases in our neighbouring health unit areas,” says Dr. Natalie Bocking, Medical Officer of Health for the HKPR District Health Unit. “While we do not want people to panic, we do want to highlight the continued need for everyone to be vigilant in following public health measures to help protect themselves and their families from the spread of the virus.”

These measures include:

- Get fully vaccinated to help protect yourself and those most vulnerable. This includes getting a booster dose if you are eligible.
- Screen for symptoms of COVID-19 daily.
- Stay home, isolate, and get tested if you have any symptoms, even mild.
- Avoid large social gatherings.
- Stay 2 metres apart from people you do not live with and wear a mask in indoor spaces.
- Consider curbside pick-up, delivery, or alternate hours for shopping, especially if you are at a higher risk for illness.

The Omicron variant was first detected in South Africa and the first case was identified in Ontario at the end of November. Additional details on the variant are still being gathered and reviewed but has been determined that it has a higher transmissibility than the Delta variant and it expected that Omicron will be the dominant strain in the province in the coming weeks, if not sooner. Preliminary information is also showing that those with Omicron are less ill with the virus, but that the current vaccines are less effective against this variant. For this reason, household members of unvaccinated contacts of cases will also be required to quarantine until negative test results are available.