

Public Health Matters

A Newsletter for Health Care Professionals

Public Health Matters

We hope you find the newsletters a useful way to learn about public health issues and services. Your feedback is welcome.

If you have any comments or questions, please email coter@timiskaminghu.com.

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Health Care Provider Alerts and COVID-19

For current and archived THU issued health care provider alerts including those related to COVID-19 please visit [HCP Alerts/Memorandums](#).

Alert: Ministry of Health- Managing Pediatric Respiratory Virus Season

Ontario is facing a "triple threat" of respiratory illnesses; respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza rates are on the rise, while COVID continues to circulate in the province.

Recommendations: Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Kieran Moore, is strongly recommending that Ontarians wear a mask in all indoor public settings. Children aged two to five should only wear a mask with supervision, if they can tolerate masking safely and can put it on and take it off.

As the risk to Ontarians increases, we need to get back to the basics that we know work:

- Mask in indoor public settings, including schools and childcare
- Stay up to date with your vaccines

- Screen for respiratory symptoms daily
- Stay home if you are sick
- Always practice good hand hygiene and clean high-touch surfaces frequently - which is especially important in fighting RSV and flu viruses

There are treatments available for clients who may be at a higher risk of becoming severely ill, including Paxlovid for COVID-19 and Tamiflu for influenza. Through the [RSV Prophylaxis for High-risk Infants Program](#), infants and children who are younger than two years of age, and who are at high risk of severe illness from RSV, may be eligible for the drug palivizumab, which is used to prevent a serious lower tract infection. Young children under five years of age are most susceptible to respiratory viruses, and adults can transmit to them.

UPDATES AND REMINDERS: Infectious Diseases

Reminder: Resources for Ontario's Universal Influenza Immunization Program (UIIP) 2022-23

With respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), COVID-19 and influenza circulating, vaccination will be very important this fall as we work to protect the health of young children, individuals, families, and communities and seek to mitigate the related strains that are being felt by the healthcare system. Please encourage your patients to receive the influenza vaccine, as well as COVID-19 booster doses for best protection this season.

Additional resources:

- [Health Care Provider Qs & As: Influenza Immunization Information for the 2022/2023 Influenza Season](#)
- [Health Care Provider Qs & As: Influenza Immunization Information for Individuals 6 months to 64 years of age](#)
- [Health Care Provider Qs & As: Influenza Immunization Information for Individuals ≥ 65 years of age](#)

For the French versions of the above documents, please visit the [Ministry of Health's UIIP webpage](#).

Reminder: Respiratory Surveillance

Public Health Ontario monitors and analyzes the spread and intensity of respiratory pathogen activity and influenza in Ontario to support local, provincial, federal and global surveillance efforts. The [Ontario Respiratory Pathogen Bulletin \(ORPB\)](#) is a comprehensive, weekly summary of provincial respiratory pathogen activity. Including information on the onset, duration, conclusion, geographic patterns, severity and progression of seasonal influenza activity.

Update: Local COVID-19 Institutional Outbreak Monitoring

Figure 1 below demonstrates the cumulative number of institutional respiratory outbreaks declared in Timiskaming over the last 10 years.

While infection prevention and control measures are in place in highest risk settings such as long-term care homes and congregate living, some COVID-19 measures were lifted in these settings as well as in the community. This may have contributed to a resurgence of respiratory institutional outbreaks thus far in 2022 in comparison to 2021.

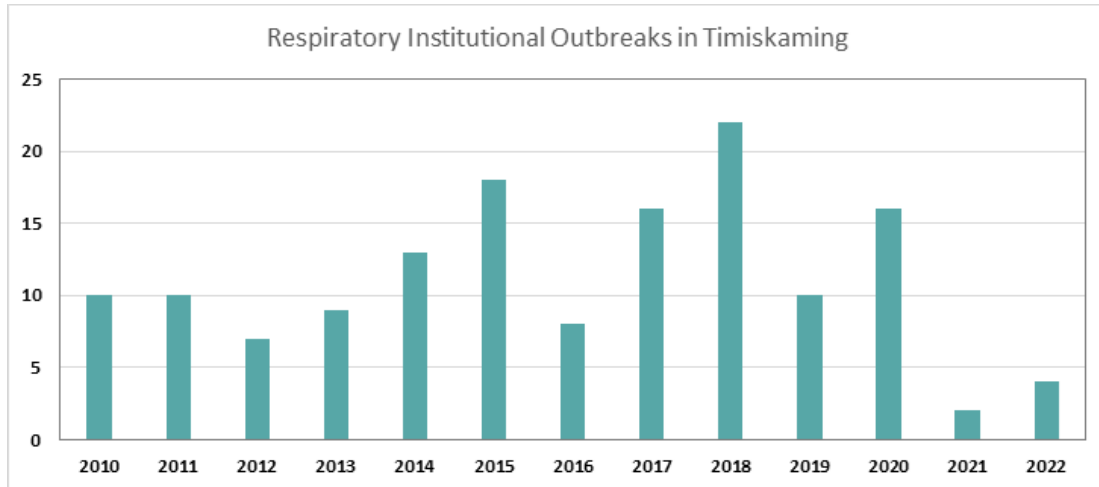


Figure 1 source: Public Health Ontario & iPHIS

Diseases of Public Health Significance - Timiskaming Health Unit 2022

As per Ontario Public Health Standards, Timiskaming Health Unit (THU) must ensure timely and effective management of local cases and outbreaks of infectious and communicable diseases of public health significance. The Board of Health is also responsible for interpreting and using surveillance data to communicate information on risks to relevant audiences. [Diseases of public health significance](#) are tracked regularly and reviewed by THU program staff.

It has been noted that the Timiskaming district has had a higher number of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* when compared to 2021.

Reminder: THU's annual report of diseases of public health significance, average number of cases per year and rates compared to Ontario, can be found in [Public Health Matters Issue 18 \(April 2022\)](#).

Unintended Consequences of COVID-19 Infectious Diseases and Sexually Transmitted Infections

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many unintended consequences to the overall health of Ontarians. Specific to infectious and communicable diseases, few resources focused on diseases of public health significance in 2020 and 2021 other than COVID-19. Public Health Ontario data on diagnostic testing and positivity rates for select infectious diseases (see [PHO Presentation](#) pp 6 -10) shows that since the pandemic began there are notable differences in testing rates. For example, prior to the pandemic, HIV and Hepatitis B testing was increasing year over year for early identification and intervention with anti-viral therapy. However, Ontario data for 2020 and 2021 shows a drop in testing. With respect to Hepatitis C and Syphilis ([p. 8](#)), there are similar trends. Of particular concern with respect to Syphilis is that while the testing rate decreased during the pandemic, the positivity rate increased.

Syphilis Rates, Prevention, Diagnosis, Testing and Management

There has been an increase in syphilis rates in Timiskaming (see Figure 2) and most recently a higher-than-average number of cases. In 2022, the rate of confirmed infectious syphilis per 100,000 is 15.5 in the Timiskaming Health Unit area; the average rate from 2018 to 2020 was 4.1 per 100,000.

There has been significant effort by THU staff to contact trace current active cases. We have also increased communication and services to high-risk groups and the general public and promoted in-house testing blitzes. It is expected that more cases will present over time.

THU holds sexual health clinics regularly by appointment. Free testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections are available, as well as free condoms.

Figure 2: Syphilis rates over time by Northern Ontario Health Unit Region and Ontario

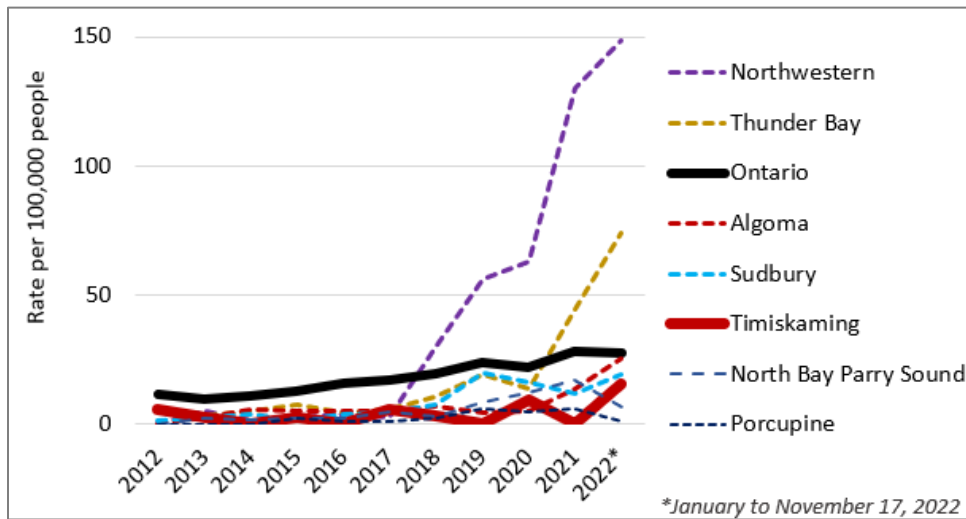


Figure 2 source: *Public Health Ontario Infectious Disease Query, 2022, Counts and crude rates – Public Health Ontario. ID Query: Ontario Health Unit: Historical Comparisons. Toronto, ON: Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion; 2022 November 17. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Infectious-Disease/ID-Query>*

Preventing Syphilis

Providing counselling to patients:

- The transmission does not require sexual intercourse and can occur with oral sex or contact with a syphilis ulcer that the person may not be aware of.
- There is a potential risk of transmission with the sharing of needles.
- The importance of condoms and dental dams;
- The importance of not sharing needles to inject drugs; THU provides sterile and clean supplies to people who use drugs.

Clinical guidelines for syphilis

- [Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections 2021 Updates Summary: Syphilis – Health Canada](#)

Screen for syphilis in those with risk factors:

- Symptoms of syphilis (including a maculopapular rash typically on the palms and soles)
- Unprotected sex with casual or anonymous partners
- Multiple sexual partners
- Substance misuse
- Incarceration
- Homeless or unstable housing
- Those requesting STI testing
- Those with a confirmed or suspected STI
- Men who have sex with men
- Sexual partner with any of the above risk factors

If there are risk factors, test also for HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, chlamydia and gonorrhoea.

Testing during pregnancy

ALL pregnant women in the catchment area of THU should be screened for syphilis at least once. Further testing beyond the initial prenatal screening, is at the discretion of the health care provider and should be considered based on ongoing risk factors, signs, and symptoms. Screen any woman delivering a stillborn at 20 weeks gestation or later, for syphilis at the time of delivery.

Other treatment information

Treatment for sexually transmitted infections is available at no charge; please contact us to arrange for free medication through your clinic.

Syphilis is a reportable disease. Notify THU if you suspect a diagnosis of syphilis. Refer to the [HCP alert](#) from September 9th for more information. For information on sexually transmitted infections for the public, ways to order resources, download the app for the most up-to-date recommendations for the management of sexually transmitted infections on your mobile device and more, visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/sexual-health-sexually-transmitted-infections.html>

Patients can also be encouraged to check out www.sexandu.ca/stis/syphilis

Resources & Forms for Diseases of Public Health Significance (Reportable)

The Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA) outlines the communicable diseases that are designated reportable in the province of Ontario. Under the authority of the HPPA, Ontario Regulations 559/91, these diseases or suspected occurrences of these diseases must be reported to the local Health Unit.

[Hepatitis C Reporting Form](#)

[List of Diseases of Public Health Significance](#)

[Reportable Disease Notification Form - THU](#)

[Test Directory \(Public Health Ontario Lab Services\)](#)

OPPORTUNITY: Cannabis Act Legalization - Feedback Opportunity

The Cannabis Act legalized cannabis on October 17, 2018. It's time to review and assess whether Canada met its initial objectives with this law which includes protecting youth, decreasing illegal activities, providing education and awareness on cannabis use, and providing adults with access to legal cannabis products.

You are invited to read [Taking Stock of Progress: Cannabis Legalization and Regulation in Canada](#) and to share your views via an [online survey](#). Another report available for review is [Summary from Engagement with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples](#) and feedback for this report can be given via another [online survey](#). Written feedback can also be submitted. Deadline to respond is November 21, 2022. Click on the links for more information.

NEW RESOURCES: Communicating About Substance Use in Compassionate, Safe and Non-Stigmatizing Ways: A Resource for Canadian Health Professional Organizations and their Membership

People who use substances experience considerable stigma and discrimination within the health care system, where it contributes to poorer quality of care, negative health outcomes and significant social and health inequities. Language is a powerful tool that can both reinforce and counter stigmatizing attitudes, views and actions. It is critical that health professionals AND their organizations reflect on the language used internally, when communicating with the general public and with patients and clients in clinical settings. The purpose of [this resource](#) is to facilitate safer, more compassionate and non-stigmatizing language related to substance use within the health system. This Public Health Agency of Canada resource is also available in [French](#).

For additional information on stigma including online learning modules and printer ready resources for staff, clients and community members, please visit <https://www.ccsa.ca/stigmaresources> (French and English).

NEW RESOURCES: Mental Health and Addictions

The province has launched new mental health and addictions resources, including the *Breaking Free* Program.

Mental health resources can be found here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/find-mental-health-support>

The Breaking Free Program can be found here: <https://www.breakingfreeonline.ca/>

NEW RESOURCE: Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy (TDAS) – Community Consultation Results

In June and July of this year, the Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy (TDAS) consulted the community to ensure the Strategy is truly by Timiskaming and for Timiskaming. It gathered input from a range of local stakeholders to better understand the landscape of substance use related harms in Timiskaming, and to collect feedback on proposed solutions. Needs that emerged are reduce stigma within the community and care provider settings; improved access to and awareness of programs and services; and more programs and services for substance use, mental health, and other social determinants of health such as housing. The information gathered through this consultation, literature reviews, local data sources, and environmental scans will inform the final Strategy. To read the results of the consultation, please see the English version [here](#) and the French version [here](#).

View the background document “*Developing the Timiskaming Drug and Alcohol Strategy (TDAS) - Background Document for Public Consultation*” [here](#) in English and [here](#) in French.

The TDAS is seeking local Primary Care Physician input. To get involved or learn more contact Kerry Schubert-Mackey (schubertmk@timiskaminghu.com TDAS Co-Chair).

OPPORTUNITY: Share your Workplace Mental Health Priorities

Well-being is the ability to address normal stresses, work productively, and realize one's highest potential. Workplaces can play a significant role in contributing to the health and well-being of employees as many spend over 60% of their waking hours on the job.

Timiskaming Health Unit is seeking your feedback on how we can help you promote health and wellbeing in your workplace. Please complete our short survey to let us know your interests and priorities for workplace wellness: www.surveymonkey.com/r/NHW25HV. Results are confidential and the survey should only take 5 minutes to complete. We ask that only 1 survey is completed per workplace, with the respondent being able to speak on behalf of the workplace (HR, manager, OHS rep etc.).

If you have any questions about the survey, please don't hesitate to contact Krystal Oviatt (oviattk@timiskaminghu.com).

SPOTLIGHT: Your Health Space

Your Health Space is a free workplace mental health service for Ontario's health care organizations, developed by CMHA.

This program aims to assist organizations in supporting Leaders, Health Care Workers, and Support Staff working in hospitals, long-term care, as well as home and community settings. Through interactive live workshops, and/or self-directed modules, your team will learn effective strategies to address chronic workplace stress and promote psychological health and safety in the workplace.

[Home - Your Health Space](#) – Organizational Leaders must register for their staff to access the training modules.

[Program Poster \(English\).pdf \(afhto.ca\)](#) | [Program Poster \(French\).pdf \(afhto.ca\)](#)

[Workshop Offerings.pdf \(afhto.ca\)](#)

SPOTLIGHT: Workplace Mental Health

Mental health is an issue that impacts every workplace in Canada. The workplace can contribute positively or negatively to a person's mental health. For resources on how to improve mental health and well-being at your workplace, check out these resources, or call us today!

[Workplace Mental Health: Timiskaming Health Unit Resources](#)

[Workplace Strategies from Mental Health](#)

[Workplace Mental Health Playbook for Business Leaders-camh](#)

REMINDER: Ontario's Publicly Funded Immunization Schedule

In April 2022, primary care partners received information on Ontario's Tdap immunization program expansion. Links to updated information are below.

- Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) vaccine program (fact sheet for the public) https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/immunization/docs/tdap_fs_en.pdf
- National Advisory Committee on Immunization; Update on immunization in pregnancy with Tdap vaccine [Update on immunization in pregnancy with Tdap vaccine - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/immunization/nacim/2021/202106-202107-tdap-pregnancy.html)
- Ontario's Publicly Funded Immunization Schedule [Publicly Funded Immunization Schedules for Ontario \(gov.on.ca\)](https://www.ontario.ca/gov/publicly-funded-immunization-schedule)

Other Resources and Information

Visit the [Health Care Provider section](#) of the THU website for resources, forms, and archived newsletters.

To receive this newsletter and any alerts, please email coter@timiskaminghu.com to be added to our distribution list. To view archived newsletters, visit [HCP Newsletters](#).

Have a comment about this newsletter or a topic you'd like us to cover? Send us your suggestions at coter@timiskaminghu.com



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