

Ministry of Health

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July 21, 2022

MEMORANDUM

TO: **Aboriginal Health Access Centres
Alliance for Healthier Communities
Association of Family Health Teams of Ontario
Community Health Centres
Indigenous Interprofessional Primary Care Teams
Indigenous Primary Health Care Council
Indigenous Primary Health Care Partner Organizations
Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada
Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics
Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics Association
OMA Section on Family & General Practice
Ontario College of Family Physicians
Ontario College of Pharmacists
Ontario Health
Ontario Hospital Association
Ontario Medical Association
Ontario Pharmacists Association
Public Health Unit Medical Officers of Health
Public and Private Hospitals**

FROM: **Dr. Kieran Moore

Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario**

RE: **COVID-19 Omicron BA.4/BA.5 Transmission Wave Seven**

As you may be aware, there is increasing international community transmission of two sub-variants of the Omicron variant of concern of COVID-19, BA.4 and BA.5, particularly in Europe and South Africa. Recent data indicates that an increasing proportion of cases in Ontario are due to these sub-variants, and the BA.5 variant is now the dominant sub-variant in the province. Overall, public health and health system indicators are showing trends of increasing transmission in the community as well as hospitalizations due to COVID-19.

Emerging data on BA.5 suggest it has similar severity to previous Omicron sub-variants, and similar sensitivity to COVID-19 treatments. Some evidence shows increased re-infection among those with

prior Omicron sub-variant infection (i.e., BA.1 and BA.2 sub-variants). Although data on vaccine effectiveness is still emerging, individuals with recent infection may still be re-infected with BA.5.

At this time, we are advising public health and health system partners to continue responding to the current increase in COVID-19 community transmission and that we may continue to see similar rates of transmission over the coming few weeks. We will continue to closely monitor and update as the situation evolves.

To further mitigate the impacts of BA.5 in the province, we are advising that communications be sent to your patients, community, and organizations on:

Vaccination

- Remind individuals to ensure their COVID-19 vaccinations are [up to date](#), especially those who have yet to receive their first booster.
- That second dose [booster eligibility](#) expansion now includes all individuals in Ontario aged 18 to 59, along with the following information:
 - Individuals who are at higher risk of severe disease from COVID-19 infection are recommended to get the second booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they become eligible, including:
 - Individuals 60 and over
 - First Nation, Inuit and Métis individuals, and their non-Indigenous household members (18 years of age and older)
 - Residents of a long-term care home, retirement home, or Elder Care Lodge and older adults living in other congregate settings that provide assisted-living and health services
 - Moderately or severely immuno-compromised individuals (12 years of age and older as of July 28)
 - All individuals aged ≥ 18 are eligible to receive a second booster dose **\geq five months (140 days)** after their first booster dose, and at a minimum of 3 months (84 days).
 - Individuals who have medical conditions that place them at higher risk of severe disease from COVID-19 and would be recommended for [treatment](#) should be encouraged to receive their second booster dose
 - Individuals' personal social circumstances, such as living with higher risk individuals or their ability to take time off work if unwell, should also be considered
 - While fall booster products and timing remain unclear, current dose intervals as mentioned above are still recommended. Individuals who receive a booster under this expanded eligibility will need to wait a minimum of 3 months (84 days) to be able to receive another dose of vaccine in the fall.
- Health Canada recently authorized the Moderna vaccine for use in children and infants under the age of 6. Counselling parents and caregivers on vaccine safety and efficacy will be critical as this is the first COVID-19 vaccine authorized for the 6 months – under 5 age cohort. Vaccine administration of the Moderna vaccine in Ontario will start July 28; Pfizer-BioNTech submitted for Health Canada approval at the end of June but has not yet been authorized for use.

- COVID-19 vaccine administration in this age group should not be done concurrently with routine childhood immunizations
- Children with underlying medical conditions should be strongly encouraged to receive their complete series

Testing and Treatment

- Ongoing provision of Evusheld and [COVID treatments](#), including Paxlovid, for those who are eligible
- Recommendations to those who are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19:
 - Have a plan for [accessing PCR testing](#) and [treatment](#) if symptoms develop
 - Ensure vaccine doses are up to date, especially those who are [severely to moderately immunocompromised](#)

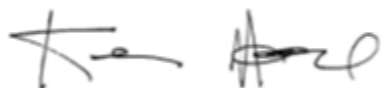
Masking and IPAC

- Ensure health care and congregate care settings are maintaining and following their universal masking policies and other infection prevention and control policies.
- Recommend masking in indoor public spaces, especially where there are crowds in close contact and in enclosed (indoor) spaces, particularly for those vulnerable to severe infection.
- Remind individuals to stay home when they are sick, to follow [public health guidance on isolating](#), mask after isolation, and inform their close contacts.

It should be noted that ongoing waves of transmission from COVID-19 variants and sub-variants are expected, and that I have confidence in the province's ability to respond to these waves of activity.

Thank you for your continued collaboration and dedication to the COVID-19 response in Ontario.

Sincerely,



Kieran Michael Moore, MD, CCFP(EM), FCFP, MPH, DTM&H, FRCPC, FCAHS
Chief Medical Officer of Health

C: Dr. Catherine Zahn, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health
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Patrick Dicerni, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health
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