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# 'NOW IS THE TIME': Etches 'concerned' about COVID-19 wave, suggests businesses may choose to reinstate masking policies

*"This is indicative that the level of COVID-19 is very high in Ottawa right now, higher than the January Omicron wave."*

Megan Gillis

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Ottawa Medical Officer of Health Dr. Vera Etches PHOTO BY ERROL MCGIHON /Postmedia

Amid a summer surge of COVID-19, Ottawa’s medical officer of health says “now is the time” to adapt to the amount of the virus circulating in the city by wearing masks, staying home when sick, getting boosted and limiting contacts.

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“I am concerned about this current wave,” Dr. Vera Etches said in a [statement](#) Thursday. It was the first such statement issued since mid-April.

Etches said that Ottawa Public Health “continues to strongly recommend” wearing masks indoors and outdoors when distancing is hard or impossible. Many businesses still require or encourage masking, and, “based on the current situation, others may choose to reintroduce masking policies in their place of business at this time,” she said.

Etches cited high levels of COVID-19 in Ottawa’s wastewater that are increasing “week after week.” The per cent of lab tests coming back positive is high and increasing, and both COVID-19 hospitalizations and confirmed outbreaks are increasing.

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“This is indicative that the level of COVID-19 is very high in Ottawa right now, higher than the January Omicron wave,” Etches’ statement said.

Omicron and its sub-variants are much more transmissible and even people with infections earlier this year can be reinfected.

“Individually and collectively, now is the time to reassess and adapt our behaviours to the levels of COVID-19 in the community,” Etches said. “This is an important skill we will all need as we head into the fall.

“Wearing masks indoors and outdoors in crowded spaces, staying home when sick, getting booster doses, and minimizing contacts during periods of high transmission in the community are all behaviours that will help us, our families, and our loved ones.”

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Etches welcomed the [news Thursday that Ontario families will be able to book first shots for children aged six months to under five](#) and second boosters for immunocompromised youth starting July 28 as “another great step forward in protecting our community.”

While rates of severe illness and hospitalization aren’t rising as fast as in previous waves, remember the virus’s potential effect on older adults, people with chronic health conditions and those who are immunocompromised or unvaccinated, she said.

People 60 and up remain at higher risk, but more than 25,000 in Ottawa have yet to get their third doses, or first boosters, and more than 88,000 still need their fourth doses, or second boosters.

“Now is the time to get your booster dose if you have yet to do so,” Etches said. “Now is also the time to reach out to friends and loved ones who are not yet vaccinated or boosted.”

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She also suggested Ottawans “lead by example” if people they knew weren’t wearing masks.

In a semi-weekly update issued Tuesday, Ottawa Public Health reported three new COVID-19 deaths, 336 new cases and 1,032 active cases, although testing is limited to certain groups. There were 64 ongoing outbreaks in institutional settings such as hospitals, long-term care and group homes.

Thirty-two Ottawa residents were in hospital due to active infections, with three in intensive care units, and there was a total of 168 confirmed COVID-19 patients in local hospitals as of Sunday. Fifty-three were in hospital because of the virus, with four in ICU, and 115 were hospitalized for other reasons, including three in ICU.



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