

Public Health Update from Southwestern Public Health



For Health Care Providers in Oxford County, Elgin County, and the City of St. Thomas

November 19, 2024

An Update from Dr. Joyce Lock, Acting Medical Officer of Health at Southwestern Public Health

What You Need to Know

MEASLES, MUMPS AND PERTUSSIS CASES IN SWPH REGION

Cases of measles, mumps and pertussis have recently been identified in the Southwestern Public Health (SWPH) region. Lab confirmation of disease assists SWPH in case follow-up and outbreak management. Please refer to the [Public Health Ontario website](#) for guidance in the Laboratory Testing section for each disease and collect all the recommended specimens. Please visit the SWPH [Infectious Diseases & Reporting page](#) and scroll down for disease specific resources.

INFLUENZA

The first lab confirmed case of influenza A has been reported for a resident of SWPH region. Please continue to administer influenza vaccine in your office. Ensure your patients living in a retirement home have a standing order for influenza treatment and prophylaxis.

FALL VACCINATION PROGRAM: GENERAL POPULATION

- Immunization for general population began in Ontario on October 28, 2024
- Eligible Individuals aged 6 months and older may receive their COVID-19/flu vaccination from:
 - Pharmacies
 - A list of pharmacies offering COVID-19 vaccine can be found at [COVID-19 pharmacy vaccine locations](#)
 - Individuals are encouraged to contact the pharmacy directly to ensure availability of vaccine, appointments, and to confirm any minimum age considerations for vaccine administration.
 - Health Care Providers
 - SWPH
 - SWPH is offering limited COVID-19/influenza appointments for eligible individuals between six months and five years of age (and their families) only
 - Smaller walk-in community vaccination clinics are also being offered for the general population ages six months and older who have **not** had a Covid-19 vaccine or confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection in the last six months. Clinic dates and times can be found [here](#).
- **Infant RSV** (monoclonal antibody) – Small quantities of Beyfortus 50 mg and Beyfortus 100 mg are available for [order from SWPH](#), while supplies last (Orders are limited to five doses of each product per office at this time to ensure all offices are able to access doses)

Southwestern Public Health
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INCREASE IN *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* ACTIVITY - KEY CLINICAL MESSAGES

- Healthcare providers should be aware of the following important updates related to the rise in *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* (*M. pneumoniae*) activity in Ontario:
 1. **Increased activity in children:**
 - Activity is highest among children and adolescents, particularly those aged 10–19, followed by 5–9 years and 1–4 years
 - Be vigilant for cases in young and school-aged children presenting with respiratory symptoms
 2. **Consider *M. pneumoniae* in differential diagnoses:**
 - Suspect *M. pneumoniae* infection in patients with community-acquired pneumonia who are not clinically improving on beta-lactam antibiotics, which are ineffective against this pathogen
 3. **Testing for *M. pneumoniae*:**
 - Ensure testing is performed using Public Health Ontario's (PHO) testing protocols or your local laboratory's guidelines
 - Testing at PHO requires respiratory specimens (e.g., nasopharyngeal swab) for PCR analysis
 4. **Antibiotic resistance awareness:**
 - PHO has identified molecular markers associated with macrolide resistance in some samples
 - For patients not improving on macrolides, consider using a second-line antibiotic regimen
- For detailed testing protocols, visit [PHO's Mycoplasma pneumoniae – Respiratory PCR](#)

LETTERS FOR LIVESTOCK, SHELTER AND WILDLIFE WORKERS

- Updated guidance letters are being sent to livestock producers, animal shelter workers, and those working closely with wildlife to prevent the reassortment of human and animal influenza viruses
- These letters, distributed via the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness (OMAFRA), the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), and other agencies, emphasize:
 - Seasonal flu vaccinations for workers in these industries
 - Biosecurity measures in farms, shelters, and wildlife rehabilitation centres
 - Screening posters to prevent entry of sick individuals into facilities
 - Reporting exposure: Workers handling animals with respiratory illness should consult their healthcare provider and disclose animal contact
- Influenza vaccine is recommended for livestock producers, animal shelter workers, and those working closely with wildlife to prevent the reassortment of human and animal influenza viruses
- Find more information about [H5N1 in humans](#)

FALL PREVENTION

- November is fall prevention month. Here are some resources to share with patients and your healthcare teams:
 - [CMHA Friendly Callers program](#)
 - [A Friendly Voice](#)-social service program
 - [Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health brochure](#) and [Guidelines on Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults](#)
 - [Social Prescribing- Online course](#)
 - [Work/Life Balance for Caregivers](#)
- For those 55+ or 18+ with disabilities, Community Support Services Central Intake can connect people with services such as:
 - Dementia and brain injury support
 - Exercise programs
 - Foot care
 - Homemaking supports
 - Meals on Wheels and transportation

LATEST INFECTIOUS DISEASES REPORT AVAILABLE

- Southwestern Public Health's [latest Infectious Diseases Report](#) provides key insights into local trends, including:
 - **Sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections:** Local rates of infectious syphilis are increasing, particularly among females, while hepatitis C rates are declining
 - **Vector-borne diseases:** Lyme disease risk areas have expanded into the SWPH region, with local rates surpassing provincial rates in 2023
 - **Enteric and foodborne diseases:** Campylobacteriosis remains the most reported enteric disease locally, with rates higher than provincial levels
 - **Respiratory diseases:** COVID-19 hospitalizations and ICU admissions have declined, while influenza rates in 2022/23 were the highest in five years, particularly affecting children under 9
 - **Institutional outbreaks:** Outbreaks more than doubled in 2022 compared to 2019, with COVID-19 as the primary pathogen
- For more details, explore the [full report on our website](#)

SUBSTANCE USE AND HARMS REPORTS

- Southwestern Public Health has published four comprehensive reports detailing substance use patterns and associated harms within our region:
 - [Youth Substance Use & Harms \(2024\)](#): This report examines substance use trends among youth, highlighting key areas of concern and providing data-driven insights
 - [Adult Substance Use & Harms – Tobacco \(2024\)](#): An in-depth analysis of tobacco use among adults, discussing prevalence, health impacts, and recommendations for reduction
 - [Adult Substance Use & Harms – Cannabis \(2024\)](#): This document explores cannabis consumption patterns, associated health risks, and community implications
 - [Adult Substance Use & Harms – Alcohol \(2024\)](#): A thorough review of alcohol use among adults, including consumption rates, health consequences, and strategies for harm reduction

ACCEPTING REGISTRATIONS FOR BALANCED BEGINNING SESSION STARTING JANUARY 29

- Balanced Beginning is a free, [virtual group-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy \(CBT\) program](#) designed to support mental wellness for individuals experiencing mood disorders during pregnancy or after giving birth
- The program duration is 9 weeks, starting January 29, 2025
- Pregnant and new parents with babies up to 18 months old who feel depressed, anxious, overwhelmed, or down may be eligible, no referral is required to participate
- Please ask patients who may benefit from the program to complete the [online registration form](#) or to call 519-631-9900 ext. 1400 (St. Thomas & Elgin County), 519-421-9901 ext. 3473 (Oxford County)

RETHINK YOUR DRINKING

- Research shows that even small amounts of alcohol can cause harm. Health care providers play a pivotal role in helping their patients understand how alcohol impacts their health and how the Canadian Guidance on Alcohol and Health applies to them personally
- For patients who are seeking more information, please direct them to [Rethink Your Drinking](#), where they can find information on alcohol harms and Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health
- If you would like to help promote the message around alcohol and cancer in your waiting room, the Rethink Your Drinking website has [many free resources](#) available to download
- For more information on the clinical management of high risk drinking or alcohol use disorders, please refer to the [British Columbia Centre on Substance Use](#)