

## Ontario reports record number of intensive care patients with COVID-19

By Nate Smelle

On the frigid morning of Tuesday, Jan. 11 Ontarians awoke to discover that the province had set another record in the fight against COVID-19. Just a week ago there were 266 people with COVID-19 in Intensive Care Units across Ontario. Overnight, 80 more adults were admitted into intensive care; which means there are now 477 individuals battling the deadly virus in one of the province's ICUs. Since the start of the pandemic, this is the highest number of individuals admitted to ICU on a single day; as well as the highest number of people in Ontario's ICUs at the same time.

Between Monday and Tuesday the total number of people hospitalized due to COVID-19 also climbed from 2,497 to 3,220. According to provincial officials, as of Jan. 11 there were at least 369 outbreaks active in Ontario's long-term care homes.

While the province was reporting 7,951 new cases that same morning, experts warned that the actual number was significantly higher, because the Ford government had made publicly-funded PCR testing available only for high-risk individuals who are symptomatic and/or are at risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Within the past 24 hours, another 21 people have also been added to the provincial death toll in Ontario.

Despite the rapidly rising number of hospitalizations and record number of people suffering from COVID-19 in Ontario's ICUs, the Ford government also announced on Monday that in-person learning would resume on Jan. 17; and that PCR testing would no longer be available to children who come in contact with a classmate confirmed to have COVID-19, unless they personally begin to exhibit symptoms of the virus.

On Monday, Jan. 10, the Hastings Prince Edward Public Health Unit announced that in light of the province's recent decision to stop making PCR tests available to the general public, it was changing the way it reports on the state of the pandemic locally. Beginning that morning, the health unit stated that it would now only be reporting the number of 'high-risk' cases and outbreaks.

According to the public health unit's website, 'in alignment with current provincial guidance, HPEPH is following exposures to COVID-19 in high-risk settings including long-term care and retirement homes, hospitals, and congregate living settings. As a result, our ability to identify outbreaks in other settings (e.g. workplaces, retail, restaurants) is severely limited. While the HPEPH dashboard is now reporting outbreaks only in the settings above, it is important to recognize this may not accurately reflect the number of outbreaks in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties.'

Acknowledging that the reported confirmed cases will not adequately reflect the true number of people with COVID-19 in the region, the health unit advises all individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 to assume they have the virus. Furthermore, the local health unit indicated that instead of reporting daily, it would now only update its COVID-19 dashboard on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, (excluding statutory holidays).

As of Monday, Jan. 10, HPE public health reported that there were 1,166 active cases between the two counties; and, 206 'high risk' cases. The revised dashboard also showed that there are 20 outbreaks currently active in 'high risk settings.' The health unit also confirmed on its dashboard that one of the outbreaks was in the Hastings Centennial Manor in Bancroft where there are presently two confirmed cases.

Since the previous report on Friday, another person lost their life to COVID-19, raising the local death toll to 22.