



Brantwood Community Services

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MEMORANDUM

TO: All People Supported and Families
FROM: Executive Director and Emergency Response Team
DATE: December 17, 2021
RE: COVID-19:OMICRON UPDATE

OMICRON

Throughout the Pandemic, we have followed Epidemiologists and evidence from reliable sources including Ministry of Health, Public Health, and the World Health Organization.

We have been monitoring the new variant Omicron since November, just as we have with other variants including Delta and Delta+. On December 2nd, I joined the Joint Health and Safety Meeting to share what we knew about Omicron, that we were monitoring the evidence, and what potential implications could be including program closures and staff travel reporting. Unfortunately, as with any new variant, time is the only way to generate reliable information based on key indicators, including severity of illness and hospitalizations. Given that hospitalizations lag initial infections, it has taken time to understand the implications of Omicron.

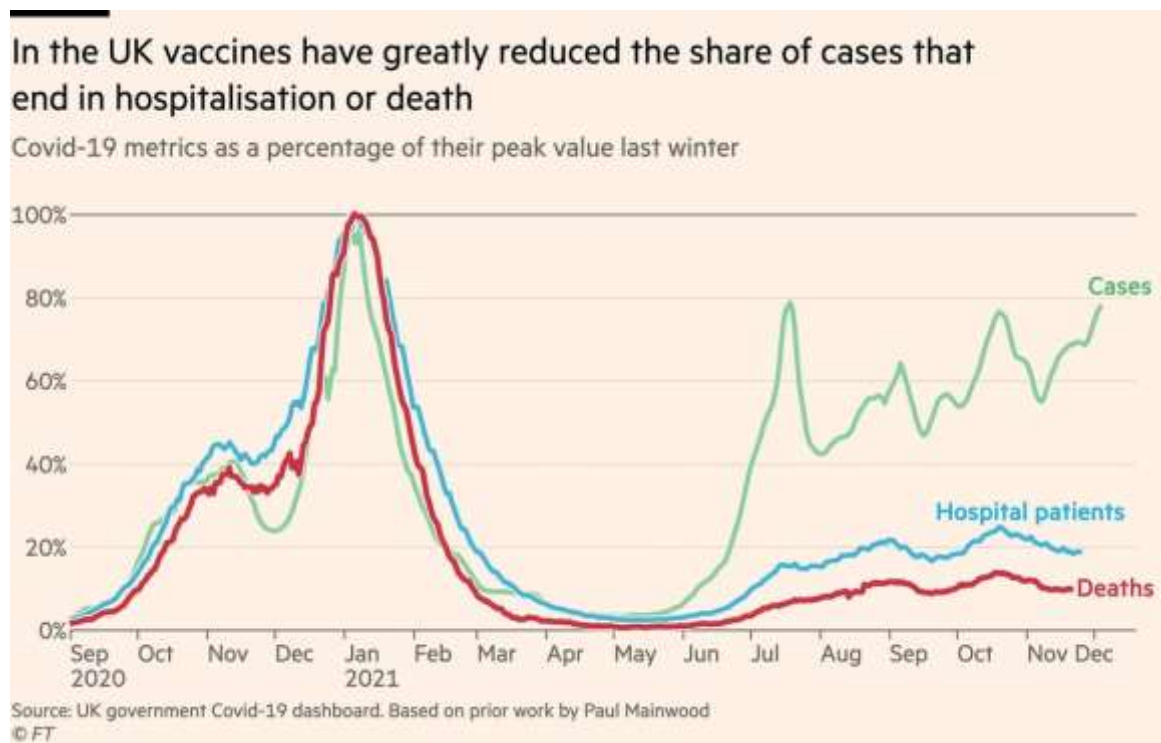
Both epidemiological and scientific research from South Africa and most recently, the UK provide us with more evidence. It should also be noted that the patterns may not be exact for reasons related to demographic differences for example, South Africa has an average age of 27 years compared to Ontario at 40 years.

The available Omicron evidence shows:

- **OMICRON IS HIGHLY TRANSMISSIBLE** confirmed by lab data on a micro-level by 2 lab studies. Ontario has reported over 3000 cases today with data suggesting over 10,000 new cases per day before New Year's.
- **WHY IS OMICRON MORE TRANSMISSIBLE?** The first two lab studies came yesterday answering this question. In the [first](#), a group of scientists in Hong Kong took human tissue from the bronchus and lung and infected it with Omicron. They

measured how quickly the virus replicated compared to other variants like Delta. What did they find? **At 24 hours** after infection, **Omicron replicated 70 times higher than the Delta variant**. This rate is important because someone is only contagious once they reach a certain threshold of virus. **The quicker the virus reaches this threshold, the quicker the host (i.e. human) is infectious**. The second [study](#) found largely the same thing.

- **PROTECTING HOSPITALS AND OUR HEALTH CARE SYSTEM:** The risk of previous variants collapsing our health care system was a significant driver in protection measures. Simply put, infection that leads to severe illness fills up hospital beds and resources are then unable to respond to non-Covid related health emergencies. **It's essential that we remain out of the hospital. Immunity has positively and drastically impacted hospitalizations prior to Omicron.** Hospitalizations and deaths are increasing in South Africa, but they are at lower rates than before. In Gauteng— South Africa's epicenter— hospitalizations are about 45% than what they were for Delta. **Excess deaths are now gaining speed, but still much lower than before.** On a national or global scale, a small percentage can add up quickly when we are talking about an incredibly fast moving virus.



- **OMICRON IS ALSO PARTIALLY ESCAPING VACCINE IMMUNITY AND INFECTION-INDUCED IMMUNITY.** So, even the vaccinated (especially those with only two doses) will get infected and spread the virus. **For those without a booster, the first line of defense is down: neutralizing antibodies aren't going to prevent infection nor transmission of Omicron.** However, T-cells should still keep a lot of people out of the hospital. **Those with boosters will be MOST protected.** That's

because boosters restimulate the immune system and increase the number of antibodies. The more antibodies we have, the more they can find the limited landing spots on Omicron. **This will decrease breakthrough cases and decrease transmission.** Boosters also generate a much broader level of immunity. In other words, **boosters develop antibodies against more parts of the virus than the primary series.** A [lab](#) study yesterday confirmed.

- **OLDER ADULTS:** Earlier this week, the Kaiser Family Foundation released a [report](#) describing severe breakthrough cases in the United States. They found that more than two-thirds (69%) of breakthrough COVID-19 hospitalizations occurred among people ages 65 and older. Another important consideration in getting the Booster.
- **GET VACCINATED AND GET YOUR BOOSTER.** There are pop up vaccine clinics throughout Brantford posted on the Brant County Health Unit website. Our staff vaccination rate is at 93%. Please speak with your physician regarding the vaccine to **protect yourself and those who are unable** to be vaccinated.

Boosters can be booked Online. Sherry Novak, Director, has been coordinating with BCHU to administer the booster to people supported in the coming weeks.

Please do not delay and book your booster online.

<https://www.bchu.org/ServicesWeProvide/InfectiousDiseases/Pages/COVID-19-Vaccine-Clinic-Appointments.aspx>

As Omicron continues to spread and poses a risk to the health and safety of staff and people supported, we are taking several additional measures outlined below.

PROGRAM CLOSURE TO REDUCE THE RISK

Due to the transmissibility of Omicron and the potential risk supporting people who live at home, all Community Connections staff will be redeployed to the homes and the **Community Connections program will be suspended effective Monday December 19, 2021** until further notice.

AIR QUALITY

The Canadian winter is upon us. Every location has been provided with a HEPA's air purification system that are running (both units) 24 hrs. Consider changing your furnace filter with a high quality filter and as possible, open windows to increase air flow. Whenever possible, consider outdoor gatherings.

RAPID TESTING

Brantwood is reporting a 93% staff vaccination rate and continue to complete Rapid Tests for staff not fully vaccinated. We are also making rapid tests available for ANY staff who makes a request.

We encourage you and your family members, regardless of vaccination status to complete rapid testing and avoid congregating indoors without a mask and/or if vaccination status is unknown based on the high transmissibility of Omicron.

The Provincial Government has also sent home rapid tests if you have a family member who attends school and is providing take home tests at LCBOs.

STAFF TRAVEL

As Omicron is an evolving situation with the potential for new travel and testing requirements, we are tracking and working with staff who are travelling out of Country and/or Province.

Please communicate with the Supervisor/Manager of the location prior to scheduling a visit if you have OR if you are spending time indoors with someone who has travelled out of Province/Country to ensure that we are following the most up-to-date testing/screening requirements.

VISITS AND HOLIDAY SEASON PLANS

At this time, we are reviewing the risks with gatherings and considering the guidance and advice of MCCSS and Public Health. **There are currently NO CHANGES at this time.** Every person must complete their own health risk assessment considering: vaccination status, indoor vs. outdoor, ability to wear/tolerate masks, # of contacts, etc.

As this is an evolving situation, we will always keep your family member and the Brantwood team's health, safety and wellness as the guiding light in the decisions we make and appreciate your continued support.

As additional information and measures are determined, we will communicate and encourage you to share any questions you may have with us.