

Good **afternoon/morning**,

As we enter what has traditionally been respiratory illness season, we are beginning to see sharp increases in infection indicators across Brant, and Haldimand-Norfolk, including COVID-19 and flu.

Local institutional COVID-19 indicators are seeing increases. Both Brant and Haldimand-Norfolk's COVID-19 wastewater signals are high. Across the province, we are seeing a sharp rise in ER visits and hospitalizations for children with respiratory infections. Locally, we are also seeing increased school absences due to illness.

We can do our part to help prevent the spread of respiratory illness in our schools:

- Wash your hands often
- Cover your cough - cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or into a tissue that you dispose of
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands to prevent germs from entering your system
- Stay home when you're sick – do not attend school or childcare, even with mild symptoms. Return to in-class learning at least 24 hours after symptoms have improved (48 hours for gastrointestinal symptoms), regardless of COVID-19 testing results or if no testing has been completed.
- Wear a mask to protect against exposure to airborne and respiratory viruses in crowded and indoor spaces, especially when recovering from being sick or around vulnerable people.
- Make a plan in the event you or your child/children have to stay home from work, school or daycare
- Stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations. If it has been over six months since their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or infection, staff and students over the age of five are eligible to receive a booster dose. Those over the age of 12 can now receive a bivalent booster dose, which is an updated version of the COVID-19 vaccine, that targets the original COVID-19 virus and the Omicron variant. COVID-19 vaccines are available through local pharmacies or appointments can be made through the [Brant County Health Unit \(BCHU\) COVID-19 Vaccine Booking Portal](#) or the [Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit COVID-19 Vaccine Booking Portal](#).
- Get a flu shot. This upcoming flu season is expected to be a difficult one based on predictive data. It is encouraged that all those six-months and older to receive a flu shot. The flu shot is safe and it's the best way to protect yourself from the flu. The flu shot is now available through

local pharmacies or health care providers. BCHU will also be holding flu clinics on select dates throughout November. Appointments are available through the [BCHU website](#).

As we go forward, we must think about COVID-19 as one player in the respiratory season. All of our tools can have a positive impact on our own health and the health of our community.