

COVID-19 Comprehensive Update

ISSUE

The emergence of the SARS CoV-2 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) resulted in adjustments to the City of Saskatoon's Occupational Health and Safety and Business Continuity Plans so that it could continue delivering highly valued and needed public services. These adjustments were aimed at mitigating workplace and community transmission of COVID-19. The City followed public health direction, advice, and guidance from various federal, provincial and local health authorities.

At its September 27, 2021 Regular Business meeting, Saskatoon City Council approved the "Framework for Measures to Mitigate the Transmission of COVID-19 in Saskatoon" as shown in Appendix 1. The intent of the framework was to assist City Council and Administration in making data-driven decisions on potential measures to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in Saskatoon, at a time when the Province was messaging that municipalities should consider implementing measures over and above provincial measures. Many circumstances have fundamentally changed since development and adoption of the framework.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Governance and Priorities committee recommend to City Council that it:

1. suspend the Framework for Measures to Mitigate the Risk of COVID-19 Transmission in Saskatoon and
2. direct the Administration to continue to comply with all Government of Saskatchewan Public Health Measures and regularly consult with the Saskatchewan Health Authority local Medical Health Officers on COVID-19 transmission mitigation measures.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Limitations of the Current Framework

The City of Saskatoon has been monitoring and reporting on various COVID-19 transmission statistics since the emergence of COVID-19. The intent was to increase internal and external awareness about data trends with respect to the viral transmission and its severity. While this ebbed and flowed with the waves of the virus, it relied predominantly on analyzing publicly reported data tabled by Saskatchewan Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada, among others. This data and the analysis of it eventually helped to establish a data-driven COVID mitigation framework.

When the Framework was first proposed by Administration and then approved by City Council, the prevailing public health direction was that various organizations, such as

municipalities, business, and not-for-profits, were to manage the transmission of COVID-19 by implementing their own measures. All provincial public health orders had been removed on July 11, 2021. The Delta Variant was emerging, and the City was working to implement a framework to ensure we were making methodical, fact-based decisions in the new environment.

However, as the Delta Variant and the severity of it affected Saskatchewan, the Government of Saskatchewan did implement new Public Health Orders including the Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination or Negative Test and the Mandatory Isolation and Face Covering. Together, these orders provide a layer of protection that was not in place when the Framework was developed and adopted.

More recently, there have also been changes to COVID-19 testing requirements and recommendations in Saskatchewan. For example, on December 30, 2021 the Government of Saskatchewan released the [Updating COVID-19 Testing and Case Management Guidelines](#). This announcement stated that “effectively immediately, asymptomatic residents who receive a positive COVID-19 result on a rapid antigen test will no longer be recommended to receive a confirmatory polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test.”

This change impacts the data for the underlying Framework, especially the 7-day average of weekly cases, the test positivity rate, and the 7-day reproduction rate. The use of rapid antigen tests in Saskatchewan has also increased significantly, and the data from these tests are not formally collected and reported at this time. This change fundamentally affected the foundational elements of the framework.

Another fundamental change is the difference between the Delta and Omicron variants. The Framework was developed in response to the rapid transmission and health services impact of the Delta variant. The Omicron variant has differences from the Delta variant, some of which would be difficult to translate into a data framework with publicly available data. Further, with the Omicron variant, Medical Health Officers are focusing much more on hospital admissions and capacity, which is not in the current Framework. As each new variant emerges the Framework would require fundamental adjustments based on the transmission and health impact of the new variant.

Administration has consistently and regularly consulted with the Saskatchewan Health Authority local Medical Health Officers throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. This consultation provides Administration with direction from a medical expert with access to data to inform recommendations. In addition, the City continues to follow all Public Health Orders as required.

Based on the changes that have impacted the Framework, the ability to consult with Medical Health experts and the requirement to follow all Public Health Orders, the Administration is recommending that the Framework be repealed, and the Administration be directed to continue to comply with all Government of Saskatchewan Public Health Measures and regularly consult with the Saskatchewan Health Authority

local Medical Health Officers on COVID-19 transmission mitigation measure. This environment would mirror the approach the City used during the first 18 months of the pandemic.

Administration has consulted with the Saskatchewan Health Authority local Medical Health Officer in preparation for this report, and, at this time, Administration is not recommending any adjustments to the measures currently in place for staff and for City of Saskatoon facilities.

Preparedness for Omicron impact

As with other sectors, businesses and organizations, the City of Saskatoon has been preparing for the impact of potential staffing issues due to the Omicron Variant. This preparedness focuses on ensuring service delivery for the residents of Saskatoon.

The City of Saskatoon provides a wide variety of services to the residents of Saskatoon. All of the departments within the City are continually reviewing and updating their Business Continuity Plans. With the number of diverse services provided, steps taken to address potential staff shortage impacts vary. At the foundation of these varying measure are the City's COVID-19 exposure controls plans. These include the following measures:

- Employee Mandatory Proof of COVID-19 Vaccination or Proof of Negative Test Program
 - 94% of staff members have provided proof of COVID-19 vaccination
 - Remaining staff members are providing proof of a negative test every 7 days.
- Fit for Duty Forms
- Medical Grade Masks for all staff
- Ventilation adjustments
- Physical Distancing
- Room Capacity limits
- Barriers
- Enhanced PPE for close contact work
- Enhanced cleaning and disinfection
- Lunchroom adjustments
- In-person meetings virtual whenever possible

Examples of the variety of measures taken by divisions are included in appendix 1.

Staffing Level Update:

The City has plans in place to mitigate the impact of potentially decreased staffing levels due to COVID-19. The City is following the direction of the Government of Saskatchewan and considering positive rapid antigen tests and PCR tests both as proof of positive COVID-19 tests. Since March 2020 the City has had 359 staff reported as

positive for COVID-19. Since January 1, 2022, there have been, at the time of the writing of this report, 202 staff members reported as COVID-19 positive and requiring self-isolation. 64% of all reported COVID-19 positive cases for staff have been reported since January 1, 2022. This is less than 5% of City staff.

At this time, there have been no service disruptions. In the case of any service level disruptions information would be provided to residents through coordinated messaging on the City of Saskatoon website and social media channels.

More specific operational updates related to COVID-19 are included in appendix 2.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Commissionaires are currently in place in all leisure facilities to confirm proof of COVID-19 vaccination or negative test upon entry. This currently costs \$13,000/week. There would be no additional costs for those locations with the approval of this report. Commissionaires are currently in place in all indoor arenas. This is estimated to cost \$10,000/week for indoor arenas. There would be no additional costs for those locations with the approval of this report. The Commissionaires support will remain in place and be reviewed monthly and will be included in future updates to City Council.

NEXT STEPS

Should City Council approve the recommendation, Administration will continue to follow all Public Health Orders and consult with the Saskatchewan Health Authority local Medical Health Officer and report to the public, City Council and City staff the COVID-19 situation for City of Saskatoon services.

Appendices

1. Division additional measures to ensure business continuity
2. Operational update

Report Approval

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