

COVID-19 Update April 2022

ISSUE

The emergence of the SARS CoV-2 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) resulted in several adjustments to operating protocols at City of Saskatoon (City) facilities and to City Occupational Health and Safety and business continuity processes. These adjustments followed the public health directions from the Government of Canada, the Government of Saskatchewan, and Saskatchewan Health Authority local medical health officers to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace and community. The Government of Saskatchewan removed the last of the Public Health Orders on February 28, 2022, including those on mandatory face masking. The lifting of the Public Health Orders does not mean there is no longer a risk of COVID-19 in Saskatoon but shifts the risk management responsibility from the provincial government to individuals, businesses, organizations, and municipalities.

BACKGROUND

At its March 28, 2022, meeting, City Council considered a report from Saskatoon Fire and resolved:

1. That effective April 4, 2022, people accessing City facilities are no longer required to wear a face mask and that masking remain required on Saskatoon Transit, to be revisited in April.
2. That all persons accessing all City facilities be encouraged to wear a face mask.
3. That the City continue to have face masks available for persons accessing City facilities, including Saskatoon Transit, upon request.
4. That as long as Saskatchewan Health Authority/Medical Health Officer advice is being provided to the City's administration regarding public health decisions, that advice should be provided in the written reports presented to Committee and Council; and
5. That Administration report back on masking protocols for transit in other jurisdictions to the April City Council meeting.

CURRENT STATUS

Effective April 4, 2022, the City of Saskatoon transitioned to encourage masking when accessing City facilities. Masks are available upon request and signage is in place to encourage masking. Masks continued to be required on Saskatoon Transit and are provided upon request. A review was completed of masking requirements for public transit in various Canadian jurisdictions. This review is provided in in Appendix 1.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

In preparation of this report, the Administration has consulted with Dr. Jasmine Hasselback, local Medical Health Officer, Saskatchewan Health Authority on the City's general approach to COVID-19. Dr. Hasselback stated:

"Although COVID-19 transmission remains remarkably high in our community, we are at a point where a person's best next step is to ensure they make a well-informed decision about their own personal risk and take action accordingly. Each person should ensure they are as immunized as they are eligible to be, 2-doses is just not enough for many. Notably there has been an expansion of the eligibility for additional doses of vaccine also known as "second boosters" and we hope to see all persons eligible seek these jabs as quickly as possible. Staying home when sick and wearing a mask while in shared spaces with the best mask possible is still strongly recommended. The overall direction of city administration demonstrates leadership in establishing a future where we all strive to thrive with the ever-present threat of COVID-19 infection."

As noted by Dr. Hasselback's statement, indications are that COVID-19 transmission is abnormally high in Saskatoon. For example, according to the most recent wastewater analysis conducted by the University of Saskatchewan, the viral load found in the wastewater are their highest levels over the last two reporting periods. Over the last two weeks, the viral load has increased by over 770% cumulatively, almost completely driven by the Omicron BA.2 variant of concern.¹

While wastewater data is more forward-looking and may reflect future COVID-19 transmission, the Government of Saskatchewan reports activity that is backward-looking. More specifically, every Thursday, the Government of Saskatchewan provides COVID-19 surveillance information at the provincial and COVID-19 reporting zone levels on a weekly basis, with the most recent report reviewing the period from April 3-9. According to this report:

- 7,996 laboratory tests were performed in Saskatchewan, reflecting 6.6 tests performed per 1,000 population. The number of tests was higher than the number of tests in the previous week (7,689).
- More than one in eight laboratory tests were positive (weekly test positivity of 13 per cent), which is similar to the previous week (13.2 per cent). Saskatoon's test positivity rate for laboratory tests was 15.9% during the week, down 2.4 percentage points.
- 1,051 new cases were confirmed reflecting about 0.9 laboratory-confirmed cases per 1,000 population. The Saskatoon zone saw 294 new confirmed cases during the week, down 20 from the previous week.
- Overall, the number of new laboratory-confirmed cases was slightly higher than the number of new cases in the previous week (1,032).
- There were 375 new lineage results reported this week. Of the 375 variants of concern identified by whole genome sequencing, 100 per cent were Omicron.

¹ For more details, please consult <https://water.usask.ca/covid-19/index.php#SaskatoonWastewaterData>

- The Omicron BA.2 sublineage accounted for 41.3 per cent of the variants of concern reported this week, which was almost twice as high as the previous week.
- There were 20 newly-reported COVID-19 deaths, 16.6 per cent lower than in the previous week (24). Two deaths were in the Saskatoon zone.
- There were 403 COVID hospitalizations for the week ending April 13, an increase of 49 relative to one week ago. ICU hospitalizations increased by 5, from 20 to 25, for the week ending April 13. However, daily hospitalization admissions have fallen from 34 to 28 per day relative to previous week.

Although COVID-19 is still a public presence, Administration continues to transition from a crisis response to COVID-19 to embed a response to COVID-19 in the normal operational procedures. This includes supporting the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) by amplifying the SHA's messaging regarding COVID-19 and specifically COVID-19 immunization and continuing to provide for residents who choose to wear them in City facilities.

Considering all factors, the Administration is not recommending any operational changes that would affect the public's interface with the City. If this report is received as information, masks would still be required on Transit on a month-to-month basis, with the issue reconsidered each month at City Council.

APPENDICES

1. Masking Approaches on Public Transit in Canada
2. Government of Saskatchewan COVID-19 Integrated Epidemiology Situation Report

Report Approval

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