

COVID-19 Update June 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 (SHA) 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.

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 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. The original review is provided in Appendix 1. An update to this review is provided in Appendix 2.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

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.

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

“Indicators of COVID-19 transmission have dropped off substantially over the last several weeks in Saskatoon. Although the risk of transmission from someone infected with COVID-19 to someone who is susceptible to infection and/or severe disease as a consequence of that infection remain important and real, the likelihood of such a situation decreases as community viral burden decreases. Regardless, each person should ensure they are as immunized as they are eligible to be - 2-doses is just not enough for many - and staying home when sick must remain a tenant of the way we live going forward. These foundational practices remain valuable in keeping our communities as healthy as possible.”

As noted by Dr. Hasselback’s statement, indications are that COVID-19 transmission in Saskatoon has lessened substantially. For example, the most recent wastewater analysis, conducted by the University of Saskatchewan, indicates a 56.3% decrease in viral RNA load in Saskatoon’s wastewater. This is the eighth smallest load recorded since the beginning of the Omicron wave; confirming that the viral load is within the low range.

The Government of Saskatchewan reports activity that is backward looking. More specifically, every Thursday, COVID-19 surveillance information is provided at the provincial and COVID-19 reporting zone levels on a weekly basis, with the most recent report reviewing the period from June 5-11, 2022. ¹ According to this report:

- 5,880 laboratory tests were performed in Saskatchewan, nearly identical to the previous week, reflecting 4.9 tests performed per 1,000 population;
- The weekly test positivity of 6.5% is higher than the previous week (4.6%); the highest test positivity this week was in the Saskatoon area (7.5%);
- 394 new cases were confirmed, reflecting 24 laboratory confirmed cases per 100,000 population (higher than the previous week n = 285 new cases). This week, the highest COVID-19 case rate was in South East (45 cases per 100,000);
- There were 94 new lineage results reported this week. Of the 94 variants of concern identified by whole genome sequencing, 100% were Omicron;
- The Omicron BA.2 sub-lineage accounted for 90.4 % of the variants of concern reported this week, BA.2 sub-lineage is more transmissible compared to pre-variant 2020 COVID-19 and BA.1 sub-lineages, but there is no current evidence of increased severity;
- There were 17 newly reported COVID-19 deaths (two within the week and 15 in previous weeks). Of the deaths reported the week of June 5 – 11, 3 deaths were of Saskatoon residents;

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

- The rate of visitors to Emergency Departments with COVID like symptoms, at 20.5 patients per 1,000 visits, was the continuation of a declining trend since the end of April; and
- There were 165 COVID hospitalizations for the week ending June 15, a decrease of 22 relative to the previous week. ICU hospitalizations decreased by 4, from 10 to 6, for the week ending June 15. Daily hospitalization admissions have fallen from 15 to 12 per day relative to the week of June 8.

Although COVID-19 is still a public presence, Administration has transitioned from a crisis response to embed safety measures in operational procedures. This includes support in amplifying the SHA's messaging, specifically COVID-19 immunization, and continuing to provide masks for residents who choose to wear them in City facilities.

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 April 2022
2. Masking Approaches on Public Transit in Canada June 2022 Update
3. Government of Saskatchewan COVID-19 Integrated Epidemiology Situation Report

Report Approval

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