

# Public Health Update from Southwestern Public Health

For Health Care Providers in Oxford County, Elgin County, and the City of St. Thomas

October 27, 2023

An Update from Dr. Ninh Tran, Medical Officer of Health at Southwestern Public Health

## Public Health: What You Need to Know

### RESPIRATORY UPDATES

#### ONTARIO HEALTH: RESPIRATORY UPDATES AND GUIDANCE

- Ontario Health shared a memo with primary care providers to summarize updates and guidance related to COVID-19 and fall respiratory season. View the full memo ([link](#)).

#### MINISTRY OF HEALTH: 65+ COVID-19 BOOSTERS

- The Ministry of Health distributed an email that is being sent to all clients aged 65 and over who have not had a COVID-19 dose for at least six months. The email was sent to 2.1 million clients over four to five days starting the week of October 23.
- How to book a COVID-19 vaccine:
  - participating pharmacies at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/vaccine-locations>
  - Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900, available in more than 300 languages (TTY for people who are deaf, hearing-impaired or speech-impaired: 1-866-797-0007)
  - COVID-19 vaccination portal at <https://www.ontario.ca/book-vaccine/>
  - Public health units using their own booking system
  - Participating primary care providers
  - Indigenous-led vaccination clinics
- How to book a flu shot:
  - Participating pharmacies
  - A doctor or nurse practitioner
  - Some local health units

#### RSV VACCINE UPDATE

- SWPH received an implementation and guidance package from the Ministry of Health late Wednesday for the RSV vaccine known as Arexvy®. Current eligibility will be limited to residents living in long term care homes and retirement homes. SWPH will plan to roll out this product through these channels.

Southwestern Public Health  
[www.swpublichealth.ca](http://www.swpublichealth.ca)  
1-800-922-0096



- As stated in the [provincial release](#), there is ongoing legislation changes underway to permit pharmacists to administer Arexvy® vaccine (not presently permitted). This will allow eligible long term care homes, retirement homes, and Elder Care Lodges to hire pharmacists to administer the vaccines in these settings.
- Arexvy® is available at many pharmacies (call ahead to arrange) with a health care provider prescription at an approximate cost of \$275 - \$300 per dose. It is currently not covered by insurance plans, ODBP, etc.
- The prescribing health care provider must arrange someone to subsequently administer the dose for the client.

## COVID-19 VACCINE UPDATE

- COVID-19 Vaccine is now readily available through most pharmacy channels.
- SWPH continues to offer clinics at our office locations in St. Thomas and Woodstock. Appointments can be booked [online](#) or by calling the Provincial Call Centre at 1-833-943-3900.

## FLU PROGRAM: LIMITED DOSES OF HIGH DOSE FLU VACCINE AT ONTARIO GOVERNMENT PHARMACY

- Please note that the supply of high dose flu vaccine for those over 65 is now very limited and your orders may be reduced or cancelled related to supply in the province.
- As noted on the [Universal Influenza Immunization Program website](#), the trivalent-adjuvanted product Flud® is also available for order from SWPH and is recommended for individuals 65 and older.

## FALL SECONDARY STUDENT RECORD REVIEW

- Back on track this Fall, over 2100 students received first notices of overdue or missing immunizations in accordance with the Immunization of School Pupils Act.
  - Many of these students are either missing submitting their vaccination record to SWPH or are missing an Adacel dose.
  - **ACTION:** Please provide students with vaccination records and direct them to return these records to SWPH in person, by mail, or online at [www.swpublichealth.ca](http://www.swpublichealth.ca) (select the immunization reporting button from the front page)
  - SWPH will be offering an onsite vaccination catch up clinic at each high school in the region and have appointments available online to support catch up efforts.

## COVID-19 ANTIVIRALS & TESTING

- Antiviral treatments are available at no cost, by prescription, to symptomatic COVID-19-positive individuals at high risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19. Treatment must be started within five to seven days of your symptoms starting, depending on the treatment. Full details ([link](#)).
- Anyone who is high risk for severe outcomes of COVID-19 is eligible for PCR testing. Those who are high-risk should get tested as soon as possible if you develop COVID-19 symptoms. Full details ([link](#)).

## CELEBRATION SPOTLIGHTS FOR VACCINATION EFFORTS

- A very big thanks and huge applause for the incredible team at the **Tillsonburg Medical Centre**. This team, to date, has administered over 1000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines to high-risk patients in their practice as part of the Fall campaign. The Tillsonburg Family Medical Centre team have been leaders out of the gate throughout the pandemic in making COVID-19 vaccination happen and deserve acknowledgement for the tremendous work they have all put in to make this happen! Thank you, Tillsonburg Medical Team.
- SWPH would also like to recognize and celebrate the efforts of **Jessica Wade, Director of Wellness at Caressant Care Retirement Home Woodstock**, for vaccinating 50 eligible residents in September with Pneumo23 vaccine ahead of respiratory illness season. Jessica is applauded for being proactive, arranging consents, coordinating and administering the vaccine in what is already a busy day-to-day experience in the name of protection for the residents she serves! Job well done, Jessica and Caressant Care Retirement Home Woodstock!

### ALCOHOL REDUCTION RESOURCE

- The Canadian Medical Association Journal recently published an article titled: "[Less is better" is the best message when talking to patients about alcohol](#)."
- The article highlights key points from Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health (released Jan 2023) and recommends that health care providers communicate to their patients that alcohol consumption, even at low levels, has adverse health effects.
- **The article notes that many patients are likely unaware of the health risks like cancer.** It's important to increase awareness that any reduction in alcohol consumption can be beneficial to health.

### CLINICAL GUIDANCE: RISKY ALCOHOL USE & ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS (AUD)

- The Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse with Health Canada [published a guideline](#) to support healthcare providers with the implementation of evidence-based prevention, harm reduction, and treatment interventions for high-risk drinking and AUD.
- Despite the high prevalence of high-risk drinking, alcohol use disorder (AUD), and alcohol-related harms in Canada, these conditions often go unrecognized and untreated in the health care system.
- **Research has shown that primary care providers can play an important role in the early detection and treatment of high-risk drinking and AUD** and in connecting patients and families with specialized care services and recovery-oriented supports in their communities. Read the full guidance ([link](#)).

### ALCOHOL-RELATED PATIENT RESOURCES

- SWPH: [How Alcohol Affects Health: What are the Guidelines?](#)
- CCSA: [Brochure on guidance to support people in Canada to make informed decisions about alcohol](#).
- CCSA: [Knowing your limits with alcohol booklet](#).
- CCSA: <https://www.ccsa.ca/canadas-guidance-alcohol-and-health-public-summary-drinking-less-better-poster> or <https://www.ccsa.ca/canadas-guidance-alcohol-and-health-public-summary-drinking-less-better-infographic>

### NOVEMBER IS FALLS PREVENTION MONTH

- Falls are the leading cause of both emergency department visits and hospitalizations for older adults ages 65+ in Ontario. In 2021 alone, there were almost 150,000 ED visits and over 36,000 hospitalizations due to falls in adults 65+ in Ontario.
- Falls in our region resulting in hospitalization that occurred in the home occurred at a **10% higher rate than in Ontario** (RR vs. ON: 1.10)
- Locally, **30% of ED visits** and **45% of hospitalizations** for falls occurred in the **home**.
- **ACTION:** Share these patient resources:
  - <https://www.fallpreventionmonth.ca/adults/take-action-adults> for great resources for falls prevention month including printable posters, checklists, and activities
  - <https://tools.cep.health/tool/falls-prevention-and-management/#integrate-falls-prevention-into-your-practice> to learn how to integrate falls prevention into your daily practice

### SYPHILIS UPDATE

- While SWPH has lower rates of syphilis compared to Ontario, rates have been climbing locally over the past several years.
  - In 2016, SWPH managed 4 cases of syphilis

- In 2022, SWPH managed 30 cases of syphilis.
- For more information, please refer to [Infectious Disease Trends in Ontario | Public Health Ontario](#).  
\*Please note this currently does not include data from 2022
- This significant increase in syphilis cases must be met by:
  - Obtaining detailed health histories around sexual health and relationships, such as partners, symptoms, risks, and concerns
  - Offering routine syphilis screening for patients who are sexually active
  - Increasing the frequency of routine syphilis testing for patients who are at high risk for syphilis
  - Screening symptomatic individuals and their contacts.
  - Prenatal screening as per guidelines, and increasing the frequency of prenatal screening for patients who are at high risk for syphilis
  - Appropriate management and treatment as per Sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections: Guides for health professionals [Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections - Canada.ca](#)
- **ACTION:** Healthcare providers can access free syphilis treatment (Penicillin G Benzathine 2.4 MU IM) for pick up for their patients through SWPH. Review the fillable form for details ([link](#)).

#### **SYPHILIS UPDATE: NEXT STEPS**

- SWPH is completing a situational assessment that reviewed the evidence on the best ways to address the rise in syphilis cases. More information to follow once it is completed.
- **ACTION:** Attend the SWPH virtual educational event for health care providers in early 2024 regarding syphilis management. For more information about this event, pre-register here: ([link](#))