

MEDIA STATEMENT**As Risk to Hospital System Increases, Vaccination is Ontario's Best Defence in Race Against COVID-19**

Toronto, ON, December 11, 2021 – “Over the past several days, there has been a sharp increase in the number of daily new cases of COVID-19 in Ontario and a significant increase in the proportion of those cases made up by the highly transmissible Omicron variant. These are very concerning signs, particularly as the colder weather and holiday season increase the likelihood of indoor social gatherings.

Currently, hospitalization levels from COVID-19 are relatively stable. However, the system anticipates and is actively planning for a significant increase in the number of patients with COVID-related critical illness in intensive care units through December and into January. The unvaccinated are at much higher risk of this serious illness than the vaccinated population.

Ontario's hospital system has dealt with major surges before and will apply that experience, as well as clinical advances in treatment. However, while Ontario's overall ICU capacity has increased during the pandemic, it is finite, especially because cases are not distributed equally across the province. Hospitals in some communities are already coping with heavy pressures. In short, COVID-19 – and the Omicron variant in particular – represent a major threat to the hospital system. The OHA is in close contact with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario Health and the Ministry of Health, and we will work with the government on the actions necessary to protect the health and safety of all Ontarians.

In this race against time, our strongest defence is vaccination. We encourage all eligible Ontarians to book appointments as soon as possible, especially those who have not yet received their first or second doses, including school-age children. Those who are most at-risk and currently eligible to receive a third dose should do so immediately to increase their level of protection.

Over the past two years, we have learned a great deal about what works in the fight against COVID-19. In addition to getting vaccinated as soon as possible, Ontarians must continue to take other steps to protect themselves and their communities. At this pivotal moment, that includes following the advice of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health to follow appropriate masking practices, work from home when possible, and keep holiday gatherings small. Hospital teams continue to do everything they can to care for and protect Ontarians. As the risk increases, they need all Ontarians – especially those who are not yet vaccinated – to do their part in return.”

- Anthony Dale, President and CEO, Ontario Hospital Association

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For more information:

Hannah Ward
Media and Communications Advisor
Ontario Hospital Association
hward@oha.com