



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health
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**2021-2022 INFLUENZA SEASON IN MIDDLESEX-LONDON AND 2022-2023
INFLUENZA VACCINE DISTRIBUTION**

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive Report No. 60-22, re: “2021-2022 Influenza Season in Middlesex-London and 2022-2023 Influenza Vaccine Distribution,” for information.

Key Points

- The 2021-2022 influenza season was remarkable in that the number of reported cases and outbreaks was much lower compared to recent, pre-pandemic seasons. There were only 53 laboratory-confirmed cases, 22 hospitalizations, no deaths and one confirmed influenza outbreak in facilities.
- Influenza A (H3) was prominent during the 2021-2022 influenza season, with no cases of influenza B reported throughout the season.
- Distribution of influenza vaccine for the 2022-2023 season has begun. The Health Unit is working closely with community partners to ensure influenza vaccine is available throughout the community.

Overview

This report provides the final analysis of the 2021-2022 influenza season, which was atypical compared to previous pre-pandemic seasons. Following the 2020-2021 season when there were no influenza cases or outbreaks reported, the 2021-2022 season was the second least burdensome season in recent years (Table 1). Only a total of 53 laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza were reported to the Health Unit during the 2021-2022 season, and no deaths were reported. As with every influenza season, more people were likely infected with influenza but did not have laboratory testing performed and so were not reported to the Health Unit, since influenza testing is prioritized to specific high-risk groups and settings. A graph showing when laboratory-confirmed cases occurred is provided in [Appendix A](#) (Figures 1 and 2).

Table 1: Influenza Cases, Middlesex-London, 2017-2018 through 2021-2022 Influenza Seasons

	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Laboratory-confirmed Cases	870	518	347	0	53
Hospitalizations	464	260	158	0	22
Deaths	44	20	12	0	0
Outbreaks	71	39	11	0	1

Throughout the 2021-2022 season, Middlesex-London cases ranged in age from 7 weeks to 90 years old. One-third (34%, 18/53) of reported cases were among children and youth ages 5 to 19 years, followed by adults 20 to 64 years of age (30%, 16/53). Children under the age of 5 years (17%, 9/53) and those 65 years of age and over (19%, 10/53) accounted for the remainder of cases. Just less than one-half (42%, 22/53) of laboratory-confirmed cases were hospitalized, with the majority reported among those ages five to 19 years (41%, 9/22).

Influenza Outbreaks

Remarkably, there was only one influenza outbreak declared in a long-term care home in the Middlesex-London region during the 2021-2022 season. This home experienced both an influenza A and a COVID-19 outbreak at the same time. The influenza A outbreak was declared later in the season, in April 2022, with a total of five influenza cases confirmed.

Since the 2020-2021 season, influenza immunization coverage rates for staff at long-term care homes and hospitals in Ontario have been reported electronically directly to the Ministry of Health, rather than to public health units. In the 2021-2022 season, the number of facilities that reported staff influenza immunization coverage was lower compared to previous seasons, and therefore coverage from the current season should be interpreted with caution. For the 2021-2022 season, the Ontario median influenza immunization coverage rate for staff in long-term care homes was 68.4%, and was 46.8% for hospital staff. Both these values were lower than estimates from the 2020-2021 season (86.0% and 62.7%, respectively).

Timing of the Season and Strain Typing

The influenza season typically occurs from October to April each year, although there is variability year over year. In the 2021-2022 season, there was increased influenza activity later than usually expected, from late March 2022 through the end of May 2022. The first confirmed influenza case was reported on December 2, 2021 with onset of symptoms in late November 2021 ([Appendix A](#), Figure 1). Influenza activity extended even later than usual this season to July 2022, with the last case reported July 13, 2022. Of the 53 laboratory-confirmed cases in Middlesex-London, all were influenza A; this is another unique feature of this season, in that no influenza B cases were reported locally. Of the influenza A samples that were sub-typed (21%, 11/53), all were typed as H3.

Influenza Immunization for the 2022-2023 season

Distribution of influenza vaccine for the 2022-2023 season has begun. Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (QIV), which offers protection against two strains of A and two strains of B, will be available to everyone aged six months and over. Additionally, a High-Dose Quadrivalent Vaccine (HD-QIV) and an Adjuvanted Trivalent Vaccine (TIV-adj), which offer enhanced protection, will be available for those aged 65 years and over. The Health Unit is working closely with community partners to ensure that vaccine is available for the unhoused/underhoused populations and promoting receipt of influenza vaccine at health care provider offices and pharmacies. Influenza vaccine will also be offered during regularly scheduled Health Unit Immunization Clinics for those who cannot access vaccine in the community, including those less than five years of age without a healthcare provider or Ontario Health Insurance Program (OHIP) coverage.

Conclusion

The 2021-2022 influenza season was unique in several ways. The number of reported confirmed cases, hospitalizations, and deaths reported were much lower compared to pre-pandemic seasons and followed a COVID-19-influenced season in 2020-2021 when no influenza cases or outbreaks were reported. Cases were reported from December 2021 to July 2022, with increased activity occurring in late March through late May. Only influenza A was detected among local cases. The Health Unit continues to encourage yearly influenza vaccination to reduce the risk of influenza infection in the community for the 2022-2023 season.

This report was prepared by the Environmental Health and Infectious Disease Division and the Office of the Medical Officer of Health.



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