

LOCAL NEWS

'What went wrong?': Rec hockey players want answers after COVID-19 outbreak in York Region

NEWMARKET
The Era

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wearing masks, following health protocols.

When COVID-19 swept through their ranks, killing one of them, they wanted answers from the local public health unit.

Here's what York Region Public Health had to say in response.

Question

The rink remained open and did not inform players of the outbreak. What are the rules for this situation?

Shouldn't players/families/users have been alerted?

Were other user groups at NTR informed of the outbreak?

Answer

• On Oct. 8, York Region Public Health received a notification of confirmed cases of COVID-19 associated with a men's hockey league at the National Training Rink (NTR); through our investigation, it was identified there was a crossover of cases between two leagues (an over-50 league and an over-40 league).

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- An outbreak among the over-50 league was declared confirmed on Oct. 8.
- Public Health sent a letter to the convener of the over-50 hockey league when the outbreak was confirmed.
- To date, there are a total of 15 lab-confirmed COVID-19 cases, with 13 being residents of York Region and two from the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.
- All cases played hockey on Sept. 27, Sept. 30 and/or Oct. 4, with the majority of cases playing on the first two dates.
- All cases were determined to be symptomatic with symptom onset ranging from Oct. 1 to Oct. 9; the most common symptoms reported were nasal symptoms, new or worsening cough, headache and/or fatigue.
- All players are fully vaccinated and meet the definition of a breakthrough infection (COVID-19 cases with a symptom onset date that is 14 or more days following the receipt of the second dose of a two-dose series COVID-19 vaccine).
- One individual was hospitalized and sadly died on Oct. 21; due to privacy restrictions and respect for the family, we are unable to share any specific details about this individual.

CONTACT TRACING

- York Region Public Health actively engages in the investigation and contact tracing of affected individuals.
- Public Health was successful in reaching NTR and obtaining the list of participants for the exposure.
- All high-risk contacts associated with this outbreak were identified and contacted directly by Public Health.
- High-risk contacts include individuals who played at the same time as a confirmed case; players who played on the ice the session prior and after the impacted team would not have been called, as they would not be identified as high-risk contacts.
- In the event public health is unable to identify all close contacts and/or a risk assessment determines there is elevated risk to the general public of contracting COVID-19, York Region Public Health may issue a public notification providing the public with information about the dates and times of the exposure and any actions to be taken by potentially exposed individuals.
- A public notice was not required for this scenario based on receiving the list of participants.
- Based on their age, all individuals participating in the league would be required to be fully vaccinated to participate.

Question

The players are wondering why similar situations that involve schools are declared outbreaks, but this case was not treated as seriously. Can Public Health comment?

They are confused about how this could have spread, given that the men who tested positive did not share a change room and were masked and double vaccinated. They are wondering if it's possible the virus remained in the air after a group of younger, unvaccinated kids used the rink before them. Is this something Public Health believes can happen?

Answer

- COVID-19 transmission occurs through large respiratory droplets and smaller droplets called aerosols depending on multiple factors.
- The highest risk for transmission is close contact (generally less than two metres) over an extended period of time with a person who has COVID-19.
- Players who are on the ice at the same time, with frequent face-to-face interactions, are at higher risk compared to an individual who enters the facility an hour later and did not directly interact with a confirmed case.
- We encourage all residents to continue wearing a mask when required, practicing physical distancing and washing your hands well and often.

Question

Are privately run rinks required to follow the same pandemic protocols as municipally run rinks?

Are facilities like NTR expected to clean/air out their facilities between user groups? The players said there was no evidence of this.

Answer

- The Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020 applies to both municipally run and privately run rinks.

- NTR confirmed they were following COVID-19 protocols.

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- All sporting facilities are to follow normal cleaning and disinfecting practices including disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and common areas often, such as entrances, counters, benches, lockers/change rooms, washrooms, etc.
- They are also required to have a COVID-19 safety plan which needs to contain measures to control the risk of contracting COVID-19, including cleaning and disinfecting procedures.
- It was reported to Public Health that the change rooms were open and being used by some individuals; this was part of the risk assessment completed.

Question

The men I spoke with believe they did everything right and wonder what they did wrong. Are there any lessons from this situation that we can take away from this?

Answer

- It is important to remember that COVID-19 still remains active within our communities and unfortunately this leads to positive cases being identified in a variety of settings.
- Everyone should be mindful of symptoms they may be feeling; if you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, even mild, seek assessment and testing at a COVID-19 Assessment Centre as soon as possible and stay home otherwise.
- We are also noticing a concerning trend where individuals are not going for testing right away when they develop symptoms.
- Even if you are fully vaccinated, it is still important to get tested; we do not want to lose the progress we have made and can't assume it is not COVID-19.
- Beginning about two weeks after the first dose, COVID-19 vaccines are very effective at preventing COVID-19 infection, serious illness, hospitalization and death; a second dose is required to achieve optimal and longer-lasting protection. Third doses are now recommended for certain special health groups to provide increased protection; visit york.ca/covid19vaccine for eligibility details.
- Although vaccination is very effective, there is still a chance you could both contract and spread COVID-19 after being immunized.
- Vaccination is a safe and effective way to prevent disease; vaccines save millions of lives each year.

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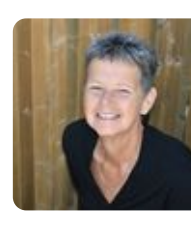


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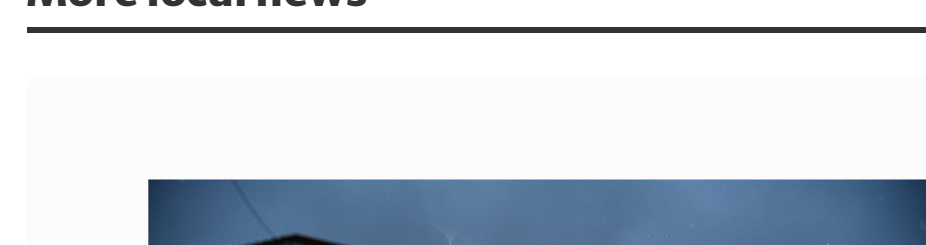
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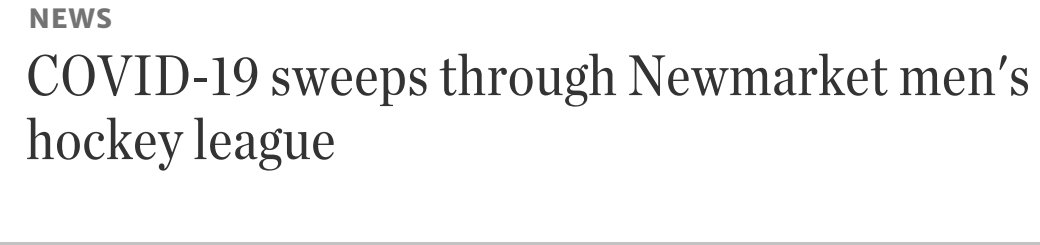
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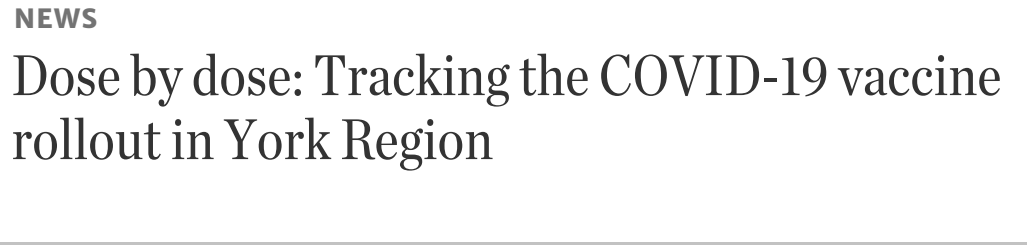
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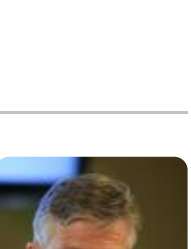
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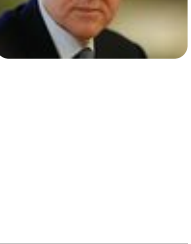
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