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St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital Implements Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination Policy

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(St. Thomas, ON) COVID-19 cases are increasing in Elgin County and across Ontario, consistent with reports from experts that we are in the fourth wave of the pandemic. This wave is being referred to as the wave of the unvaccinated.

“The highly contagious SARS-COV-2 Delta variant accounts for most of Ontario’s current cases. This variant is significantly more transmissible than anything we’ve experienced since the pandemic began,” says Tonya Sheldon, Vice President Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer at St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital (STEGH). “Our priority at STEGH is to protect our patients and our teams. Other variants are likely to emerge, particularly in the partially or unvaccinated population. The move toward a mandatory vaccination policy will help us to maintain clinical care capacity in the hospital and continue to reintroduce services that were paused during previous waves of the pandemic.”

The mandatory vaccination policy at STEGH requires staff and physicians to be fully vaccinated (two vaccine doses and 14 days since last vaccine dose) or test negative for COVID-19 prior to coming to work. All new staff and physicians, students, volunteers and contractors must be fully vaccinated before coming onsite. Most staff and physicians at STEGH have already received two doses (89.3%).

STEGH supports the province’s decision to mandate vaccination in high-risk settings including hospitals, and similar to what is currently in place for long-term care homes.

“As vaccination becomes a dominant message heading into the fourth wave, we must continue to reinforce the important infection prevention practices that are in place,” says Dr. Douglas MacPherson, Infectious Disease Specialist. “I urge everyone to remain vigilant with hand hygiene, health care workers staying home if ill, masking, and physical distancing. While COVID-19 vaccines have proven effective at preventing most people from becoming seriously ill, admitted to hospital and ICU, or dying, we don’t know whether the vaccines prevent people from passing the virus to others.”

There are a total of 23 active cases in the Southwestern Public Health region as of today. Of note, 81% of the region's population over the age of 12 has received a first dose and 74% has received a second. Those who aren't fully vaccinated are at a high risk of becoming seriously ill and needing hospitalization, as well as transmitting the virus to family members, including young children, and others with whom they come into contact.

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