

Number of cases in April will determine the extent of COVID-19 locally

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Report

As Simcoe County passes 100 cases of COVID-19, the precautions people take now will determine the extent of the virus' impact.

"April is a very key month for us in this outbreak," stressed Dr. Charles Gardner, Chief Medical Officer of Health for Simcoe Muskoka.

"This is the month in which we are going to see the extent to which the surge occurs," he added. "The better that we do this, the less that surge will be, and the less likely we are to see our healthcare system overloaded?"

As of Monday, New Tecumseth had nine active cases of novel coronavirus, eight of which were from close contact with a known infected person or acquired in the community.

The lack of travel-related cases locally demonstrates the importance for measures aimed at flattening the curve.

"People need to exercise those physical distancing recommendations?carefully consider whether you need to go out, limit the number of times that you go out, focus on essential things that need to be done, such as shopping for food or medications," Dr. Gardner said.

Individuals who work in healthcare or long-term facilities are prioritized for testing if they develop symptoms.

Staff at a neighbouring long-term care facility, Bradford Valley, tested positive for COVID-19 over the weekend and the outbreak has affected a total of 10 residents.

"They are in isolation on the premises with the exception of one staff member who's in self-isolation," noted Dr. Gardner.

He said there's been significant interest from the public regarding the effectiveness of wearing homemade cloth masks in public to prevent the virus' spread.

"Dr. Theresa Tam, the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, has indicated that what's really important is that people do their physical distancing and the hand washing and the two meter setback, staying at home if you can, certainly if you're ill staying home for the 14 days," Dr. Gardner noted.

"She indicated though that individuals may want to wear a mask when they're in situations where they can't socially distance, can't physically distance the two meters."

Members of the public should not be wearing surgical, procedural, or N95 masks, as there is currently a shortage for hospitals across Canada.

"All of those [masks] at this time we really need to retain for healthcare workers," Dr. Gardner stressed.

He said those who do wear homemade cloth masks should be aware they won't prevent the illness from being contracted.

"The potential value of a mask is more the prevention of spread to other people," Dr. Gardner explained. "They've not been shown to really prevent respiratory viruses from coming into your airway?"

There is also the "potential for complacency" among individuals who wear masks in public, according to Dr. Gardner.

?You might get a sense of reassurance that's not warranted and also the potential for you to be touching your face or touching the mask and then contaminating your hands then there's the potential for spread,? he noted.

Dr. Gardner said during this time it's important to support those who struggle with food insecurity by supporting local food banks.

?All of us have some challenges in going shopping, there's lines in order to get into grocery stores because they're abiding by the limits of number of people on the premise?so people with food affordability are all the more challenged and I understand that food banks need everyone's support,? he explained.

Meanwhile, Ontario's Officer of Health, Dr. David Williams is recommending that people above 70 not go out at all and to call 211 if they need assistance or utilize online ordering.

Due to a lag in some delivery services, Dr. Gardner said elderly individuals may need to rely on family and friends to help them out through this time.