

Health officials advise the public to physically distance this Mother's Day

The number of COVID-19 positive cases is starting to slow down, but health officials are advising people to still exercise physical distancing, particularly during Mother's Day this weekend.

While there are only six people currently infected in New Tecumseth and 16 recoveries, there have been over 300 positive cases in Simcoe County, of which half have recovered and 22 have died, as of press time.

"It's important to avoid transmitting this infection to other people, particularly vulnerable people," noted Dr. Charles Gardner, Simcoe Muskoka Chief Medical Officer of Health "I would recommend that when you reach out to your Mother on Mother's Day, that you do it in a distanced fashion, you can do it through distance technology," he added.

"If you do actually go by their property, then you must maintain that distance? because you don't want to transmit this to your mother, your father, other older people in your family or to anyone else for that matter.?"

COVID-19 has a larger impact on elderly populations as they are most at risk and account for almost all of the deaths in Simcoe County.

When looking at the epidemiological curve for the virus, it has flattened but continues to spread and won't disappear anytime soon, Dr. Gardner noted.

"I'd say if we're declining, it's at the beginning of that, we're not really well into declining and we're still having very much cases and outbreaks happening in long-term care," he stressed.

There are several ongoing outbreaks in long-term care facilities and retirement homes in Barrie, Waubesa, and Bradford, which have infected 52 people.

At Bradford Valley Long-term Care alone, there have been 42 laboratory confirmed cases effecting 35 residents and 11 staff. Of those, nine have died, one is hospitalized, and one has recovered.

To date, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) has completed a total of 1,200 tests in long-term care facilities that are in outbreak and a further 397 tests in facilities operating normally to help identify possible asymptomatic cases and have early identification of outbreaks.

There was recently a cluster of COVID-19 cases at a childcare centre in Toronto and, since then, the provincial government has directed health units to test all workers in all childcare centre.

SMDHU is proceeding with this testing over a two-week period as well as testing of all residents and staff in long-term care, totalling 7,800 people.

While it's a large undertaking, Dr. Gardner said the health unit is up for the challenge.

"We will be hunkering down and carrying that out to the very best of our ability," he noted.

Dr. Gardner said it's important to note that community transmission is still a problem and asymptomatic cases can infect others, so physical distancing remains paramount to limiting the spread.

"Two metre setback from other people, avoiding crowds, frequent hand washing, if you develop any symptoms you need to go into self isolation and then seek assessment and testing," he noted. "Certainly, I encourage people to get tested, it's much better if you

know your status so we can follow up with you.?

The total amount of tests that have been conducted in assessment centres in Simcoe County alone is close to 9,000, so roughly 1.67 percent or 167 people per 10,000 population have been tested.

In the last two weeks, there has been a rate of 86 tests per 10,000 people or 0.86 percent of the population in Simcoe County being tested.

Stevenson Memorial Hospital currently has an assessment centre setup in its lower parking lot that runs Monday, Wednesday, Friday from 3 to 7 p.m.

The centre is meant to screen patients who have symptoms or were in close contact with someone who has COVID-19.

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Reporter