

Simcoe Muskoka sees COVID-19 cases level out: Health Unit

Ontarians have been asked to sacrifice their daily routines to "flatten the curve," which protects the Province's healthcare system from being overrun by COVID-19.

While the public has had mixed responses to the government's restrictions imposed around the virus over the past two months, modelling shows preventative measures are working.

"We've made tremendous progress; in the last three weeks we've actually seen a levelling out [of cases]," said Dr. Charles Gardner, Chief Medical Officer of Health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU).

Simcoe County has confirmed 412 cases, 286 recoveries, and 33 deaths, while New Tecumseth has faced 44 cases, 26 recoveries, and one death, as of press time.

The overall number of cases in Simcoe County isn't yet trending downwards but the rate at which the infection is spreading has slowed down significantly, according to Dr. Gardner.

"It does speak to the importance of maintaining the control measures, the physical distancing measures that people need to continue to be very careful about," he remarked.

SMDHU recently released its analysis for expected case projections if COVID-19's spread continued at its rate of growth between March 15 and April 3, a time when the rate of infection was steepest, with case counts climbing exponentially.

During that period, each positive case resulted in an additional 1.9 people becoming infected and the total case counts would frequently double.

"The key for us in managing an outbreak is to get that number under one, so that less than one new case occurs for every case that you've got," Dr. Gardner said.

"When that happens then it's going down, it's coming under control, and it's getting less and less every time."

If Simcoe County wasn't able to flatten the curve and reduce the rate at which the virus was spreading early on, instead of 432 cases in Simcoe and Muskoka, there would be nearly 7,000, according to SMDHU's analysis of case projections.

"We've averted over 6,500 cases with the public health measures that were put in place," Dr. Gardner said.

Meanwhile, Premier Doug Ford has started to reopen certain businesses in Ontario.

It started with golf courses, marinas, retail stores and services with on-street entrances, pet care, veterinary services, and construction.

Sports fields and areas with recreation activities have been reopened as well.

Hospitals are starting to assess their ability to commence elective surgeries or procedures and their readiness for responding to COVID-19, should a second wave of infections emerge.

While the COVID-19 situation may appear positive for Simcoe County residents, Dr. Gardner stressed that there's still a mild upward trajectory in transmission, so remaining vigilant about the virus is important.

?We might have a relatively low rate of transmission compared with the Toronto area where it's perhaps three times higher on a per capita basis, but we're not coming down yet,? he noted.

By Sam OdrowskiLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter