

## Simcoe Muskoka to hire 20 additional nurses for return to school

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is currently working with school boards in the region to reduce risks in the classroom this September.

The Provincial Government is allotting \$50 million in total to all of Ontario's health units for the hiring of about 500 additional nurses that will work directly with the schools.

In Simcoe Muskoka, 20 nurses will be hired to work across the 210 schools in the area.

"We don't have the funding for it yet for that, but we will be recruiting more nurses and applying a team approach to the school," said Dr. Charles Gardner, Simcoe Muskoka Chief Medical Officer of Health.

He said the number of schools allocated to each nurse will be quite high, so a lot of the communication will take place remotely, due to the logistics of servicing so many different areas.

The nurses will be the main point of contact for advice and consultation regarding potential cases and safety measures.

"Certainly, if there's an outbreak in a school, a clustering of more than one case, then we will be indeed on the premise on site to investigate," noted Dr. Gardner.

SMDHU is still awaiting a guidance document from the Province about the exact protocol that will be followed when a student tests positive for COVID-19.

With school rapidly approaching, Dr. Gardner said he's hoping that document comes soon, allowing SMDHU more time to prepare.

"Time grows short? Ideally we would have it now if not a little while in the past," he remarked.

"I will be happy when it arrives, the later it comes the more challenging it is for us to be able to assure the public, to be able to put at ease the schools and to be able to advise the other healthcare providers and the healthcare system what their roles would be in response to an outbreak."

Meanwhile, some school teachers are expressing anxiety about a return to the classroom, as they are at a greater risk of health issues when infected with COVID-19 compared to youth.

"Children have had an extremely low incidence of complications from COVID-19, whereas adults, the older you are, the greater the likelihood of having a severe complication, requiring hospital admission, admission into the Intensive Care Unit, ventilation and death," Dr. Gardner said.

"All of those are possibilities and the older you are the greater the risk and if you have concurrent medical conditions then the risk goes up as well," he continued.

"I would concur that teachers need to be vary cautious, they need to abide by physical distancing in their work and they need to abide by the use of PPE if they're coming into contact with children."

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Reporter