

## SMDHU looks at negative impacts of COVID-19 related restrictions

A report was recently released by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) looking at the harmful impacts of COVID-19 related control measures put in place to prevent transmission.

The report found that the isolation and confinement measures imposed during the lockdowns had a significantly negative impact on people's mental health and general wellbeing. An increase in abuse of substances such as alcohol was noted as well.

"There were reports of distress in children, increases in domestic conflict and also some negative impacts on access to services at the height of the restrictions and that in particular those of low income for example, were more deeply affected by these matters," noted Simcoe Muskoka Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Charles Gardner.

He said in the future if COVID-19 related restrictions are imposed again, decision makers in government need to account for how the restrictions will negatively impact the population and mitigate harm where possible.

SMDHU also recently released a report demonstrating higher prevalence of COVID-19 in ethnic communities within Simcoe Muskoka, which is in keeping with findings elsewhere in Ontario.

Research across Ontario suggests people living in low income housing with less stability are often more disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, however this is not the case in Simcoe Muskoka.

The SMDHU report showed neighbourhoods with higher incomes had higher rates of COVID-19.

"So instead of poorer neighbourhoods it's better off neighbourhoods that also have a higher degree of cultural diversity that are more affected by COVID-19 here in Simcoe Muskoka," Dr. Gardner said.

SMDHU is now looking further into the issue to see if the higher rates in those communities are correlated to higher concentrations of COVID-19 in the southern municipalities of Simcoe Muskoka, which borders regions with much higher incidence rates.

"It may very well be the working populations in these neighbourhoods that are working south of here that are potentially picking it up in their work environment or picking it up in public transit, so it might be a reflection of workplace and transit dynamics in those communities," noted Dr. Gardner.

Simcoe Muskoka has had a little over 700 cases of COVID-19 in total, of which 30 are active and 638 have recovered as of press time.

New Tecumseth has seen a total of 85 cases, of which 84 have recovered and one person passed away. This means the community currently has zero active cases. The last case of COVID-19 in New Tecumseth was recorded on August 21.

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Reporter