

COVID-19 continues its momentum in Simcoe Muskoka

COVID-19 continues to gain traction in Simcoe Muskoka, passing 1,200 cases in total, as New Tecumseth approaches 200.

While the rise in recorded cases is alarming, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Charles Gardner said he worries more about the cases they're missing.

"I am absolutely very concerned about the increasing numbers; not just the numbers we see, I'm worried about what we don't see," he explained.

"The transmission that's happening now, you won't see it for two to three weeks and so anything we do now to turn this around will be delayed in its impact by at least that long."

Part of the recent rise in cases can be contributed to COVID-19 fatigue, where individuals are increasing the number of contacts they see and letting down their guard, Dr. Gardner noted.

He said it's a challenge to overcome this with the virus being so new and unprecedented.

"It is the pandemic of the century after all, so nobody with living memory has experience with this and it's been going on a long time," Dr. Gardner said.

"We're just not used to that, we're not used to having to restrict ourselves socially or economically with our work, for months on end, we're not really well equipped as human beings to do that well, so that's an enormous challenge and, therefore, we're vulnerable to having these resurgences again," he continued.

The best strategy for reducing transmission in the interim is by only closely associating with members of one's household or having those who live alone only associate with one other household, Dr. Gardner said.

However, physically distanced socialization can take place with anybody so long as it's done safely, he added.

"It's possible to go for a walk, physically distancing with a friend who's not a household member," Dr. Gardner said.

"It was easier in the summer when the weather made it easier to do that kind of outdoor social activity. You could potentially have people in your backyard and still be physically distancing."

Weather is going to be another obstacle as the pandemic is projected to carry on through the fall and winter.

"I think we're really in for a challenge as the weather gets colder? we're going to have to get better at overcoming the weather in order to take advantage of the outdoors as way of socializing and being engaged with people that are outside of our household," Dr. Gardner noted.

"I just keep coming back to no matter what it will be a challenge. People need to know upfront it's going to be a challenge and prepare themselves emotionally for that."

Meanwhile, cloth masks or face coverings have stirred up ample controversy online over the past several months since becoming mandatory, with countless people arguing over their efficacy on social media.

A common misconception among the public is that individuals wear a non-medical mask or cloth face covering to protect themselves from the virus when it's actually the opposite.

?The protection they provide are actually for others, the cloth masks won't really protect you from exposure to people, they'll protect other people from you. The masks catches the droplets that you breathe,? explained Simcoe Muskoka Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Charles Gardner.

"Therefore, we couldn't really rely on a cloth mask to protect you if you've had an exposure and they're not as protective in general as medical grade masks, even from the point of view of protecting other people from you, a medical mask would be more helpful from that point of view as well."

By Sam OdrowskiLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter