

COVID-19 numbers at Simcoe Manor stabilize, more residents/staff slowly recover

The COVID-19 outbreak at Beeton's Simcoe Manor appears to be under control as the last new positive case was reported on October 17 following facility wide testing two days prior.

Last Friday, the long-term care home lost two more residents to COVID-19, bringing the number of fatalities within the residence to nine.

A total of 40 residents have tested positive for COVID-19 since the outbreak started on October 2, of which 26 cases have been resolved and 28 staff have tested positive altogether, but 11 now have negative test results.

"We continue working very closely with that facility, with Simcoe County as the operator, with RVH who have been brought on as leads in response to the situation. The Stevenson Memorial [Hospital] continue to provide us with personnel, resources and expertise as well," noted Dr. Charles Gardner, Medical Officer of Health for Simcoe Muskoka.

"Every agency involved, everybody involved has been working very hard to bring that under control. Everybody at that facility has been tested a second time and we continue with stringent infection control measures and continue with providing, through the participating agencies, additional human resources to respond to that situation."

Dr. Gardner said the cause of the outbreak at Simcoe Manor is still under investigation and its typically not precisely known in these types of circumstances.

"The majority of the time they begin with staff cases or at least they're the first cases that we know of," he explained.

"In fact, although staff do exercise caution, self monitor, and self exclude if they become symptomatic, for two days before they're symptomatic they can still be infectious to others, so there's no way for them to know that," Dr. Gardner added.

"There's the routine testing that happens every two weeks for staff, but that can easily miss people who are incubating and don't yet have a positive test result or who contract the infection in the interim."

New Tecumseth as a whole has close to 60 active cases, two of which are hospitalized, out of its total of 212 cases since the start of the pandemic. There have been 11 COVID-19 related fatalities in total and nine of them came from Simcoe Manor.

Simcoe Muskoka as a whole has over 160 active cases out of the over 1,300 individuals who have been infected. Five people are hospitalized and there have been 49 deaths to date.

Meanwhile, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) is finding just over 70 per cent of cases have an identifiable contact as a means of transmission while the remainder come from an unknown source.

This is relatively high compared to Ontario, which is identifying about 50 per cent of sources.

In terms of the source of infection, family gatherings, workplaces and transmission within households rank high on the list.

"Some of the households can be very large and crowded, so that becomes a risk factor in and of itself," noted Dr. Gardner.

"The people involved, it's not as though they are doing anything that's contrary to our advice?it's just that once infection enters the home it would be difficult to prevent transmission from happening throughout the entire household."

Individuals in households with a large number of occupants often have jobs and end up potentially exposing other people in the workplace, said Dr. Gardner.

"What I think saves us from transmission in those workplaces is the control measures that are now required, physical distancing and mask use," he explained.

"It's critical that employers continue to maintain those safety measures and that employees abide by it as well and that they exclude themselves from work if they develop symptoms."

Dr. Gardner said all transmission of COVID-19 comes down to human interaction and it's essential for the public to exercise caution, especially now as the Province faces a second wave.

By Sam Odrowski Local Journalism Initiative Reporter