

Medical Officer of Health: Report to The Board of Health

Prepared by Dr. Jim Chirico
Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer

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Table of Contents

Medical Officer of Health Update	2
Pandemic Update	2

Medical Officer of Health Update

Pandemic Update

Much has evolved since the last Board of Health meeting. The province has experienced a significant decline in the number of COVID-19 cases, deaths, hospital admissions, critical care admissions, and outbreaks. This is an indication that the province is on the declining side of the first wave of the pandemic. Subsequently, relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions has ensued in a staged and regional approach. Initiation of these measures will open the economy more widely and provide much needed mental health and wellness support.

The northern health units have not experienced the same COVID-19 impact that many southern health units have encountered. The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit has some of the lowest number of cases as well as one of the lowest positive test rates of only one in every 300 tests completed throughout the province.

While COVID-19 testing is not the mandate of public health, when directed to organize the testing of Long-Term Care Homes, the Health Unit collaborated with the Long-Term Care Homes and the Assessment Centers and finished three days ahead of schedule. The Health Unit, without being directed to do so, went on to organize the testing of all Retirement Homes throughout the district and was accomplished within a couple of weeks.

Additionally, all case management and contact tracing within the district has been completed within 24 hours of notification of a positive case. The Health Unit responded to a request from Toronto Public Health and Peel Regional Public Health to assist with COVID-19 case management that had exceeded their capacity. Over 100 cases were managed within a four-day period.

From the outset, Health Unit Covid-19 response actions were guided utilizing the Incident Management System (IMS) structure. For example, the Health Unit's call center has fielded thousands of calls providing support, interpretation of test results and guidance documents, advice, education and arranged testing at Assessment and Testing Centers. They were initially instrumental in diverting hundreds of patients from the Emergency Departments avoiding them from being overwhelmed and enabling them to focus on the needs of the acutely ill.

Staff proactively called organizations to provide support on infection prevention and control issues and worked with many community partners to address the needs of the most vulnerable.

Surveillance and epidemiologic data has been provided to both the public and hospitals throughout the district in an effort to keep them apprised of the evolving pandemic in order to inform decision-making.

While much of the regular public health work was put on hold and staff deployed to other duties, urgent and emergent work continued in Vaccine Preventable Diseases, Sexual Health, Clinical Information, Needle Exchange, Environmental Health, Healthy Families, and Oral Health. The Health Unit continued to support the collaborative work of the Gateway Community HUB servicing the needs of clients at acutely elevated risk.

So far, we have managed to keep our expenditures under the 2020 approved budget. If that does not continue due to a resurgence in the virus an application will be made for the extraordinary CO-VID-19 costs which we are tracking separately at this time.

The Health Unit's next phase will focus on slowly resuming regular work as the province continues to reduce restrictions and to prepare for the second wave of the pandemic, which is likely to occur. The timing and severity is unknown now. Speculation is that it may occur as early as the fall. As restrictions are loosened, this may also contribute to a resurgence in cases, which is being actively monitored.

The race to procure a vaccine is well underway but is not expected to be available anytime soon. That is why physical distancing and personal hygiene measures are still critical in preventing the spread COVID-19.

As the pandemic continues to evolve, I am committed to keeping you all apprised of significant changes.

Approved by

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