



Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board

Tuesday, March 25th, 2025

HEALTH PROTECTION

Healthy Environments

Emergency Management Program:

RCDHU attended the initial engagement meeting for the 2025 spring Freshet (snow and ice melt) with municipal partners, Ontario government ministries, waterpower agencies, and Algonquins of Pikwakanagan. This is an annual collaborative process to monitor water levels and communicate public health and safety matters between affected partners, to prepare and manage potential emergency situations. In preparation, RCDHU website flooding resources were reviewed and updated.

Recreational Water Program:

Public health inspectors are currently busy completing public pool and spa inspections to meet ministry of health quarterly targets. Inspectors check water chemistry, safety signage, emergency equipment, recordkeeping, and general sanitation and facility operation to make sure regulatory standards are met. There are currently 20 pools and spas in Renfrew County and District (RCD) that are routinely inspected at least 4 times per year.

Food Safety Program:

RCDHU experiences a steady demand for the safe food handler certification course. It is a one-day in-person course taught by public health inspectors meant to train food handlers in the proper techniques of safe food handling and give them an understanding of the food safety laws in Ontario. RCDHU offers this course free of charge to minimize economic barriers. In Ontario, every food establishment that prepares high risk food must have at least one certified food handler on site while open. So far in 2025, RCDHU has offered 2 courses and certified 68 people.

Immunization

Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA):

As of February 28, 2025, the number of students not meeting Immunization requirements decreased by an additional 479 students since the last MOH report. Since the beginning of Immunization surveillance work, the number of students not meeting requirements has decreased by about 41%.

As of February 24, 2025, 363 second notices and suspension orders were sent to students born in 2007 and 2017 who have not met the ISPA Immunizations requirements. As of March 18, 2025, the number of students not meeting Immunization requirements in those 2 cohorts decreased to 235. The number of students remaining on the suspension list has decreased by approximately 35%. Orders for suspension will only become effective if immunizations or a valid exemption are not

reported to RCDHU before March 26, 2025.

Staff continue to work closely with schools, families, and health care providers to support them with resources needed for students to meet the ISPA Immunization requirements. Community-based catch-up immunization clinics are available throughout RCD by booked or walk in appointments. Students can also be vaccinated through their health care provider, and report their immunizations back to RCDHU, preferably through the online [Immunization Connect Ontario tool \(ICON\)](#), or via fax, mail, or email.

Measles Preparedness and Response

Ontario is experiencing a measles outbreak involving 350 cases as of March 12, 2025. Most outbreak cases have been reported in Southwestern Ontario by Southwestern Public Health and Grand Erie Public Health. Approximately 96% of infections have been in people who are unimmunized or with unknown immunization status. At this time, no cases of measles have been reported in Renfrew County and District. The last local case of measles in our area was in 1991. Cases have recently been reported in neighbouring regions, including North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit and South East Health Unit.

With the provincial measles outbreak occurring, RCDHU has been actively working to promote awareness around the importance of being up to date with the measles vaccine, as well as measles symptom awareness. A media release was issued on March 7, 2025, [Renfrew County and District Health Unit Is Encouraging Residents to Ensure Their Measles Vaccinations Are Up to Date and Be Aware of Measles Symptoms](#). Additionally, communication was sent to all healthcare providers and hospitals alerting them to the current measles activity and reminding them of the importance of measles immunization, along with the timely reporting and testing of any potential cases while following airborne precautions. RCDHU has also provided direct outreach to under-immunized communities within RCD that have potential for improved vaccination coverage.

As of March 10, 2025, the overall coverage rate for a measles containing vaccine among school aged children in Renfrew County and District is approximately 91.7%. Having two doses of Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine is 97% effective at preventing infection. Measles containing vaccine can be accessed through a healthcare provider, or through an RCDHU Immunization clinic. For more information on measles or to schedule an appointment, residents can visit <https://www.rcdhu.com/healthy-living/measles/> or call the Immunization Line at 613-732-9436.

RCDHU has been actively reviewing and updating internal preparedness and response measures to support any additional work that may impact program operations should confirmed cases of measles be reported. RCDHU has also engaged with external partners to support preparedness and response measures.

Collaboration with North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit

The Board passed a motion in January supporting cross-coverage from Medical Officers of Health at neighbouring health units for temporary short-term absences (e.g., vacations). The initiative is off to a great start, with North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (NBPSDHU) having provided Medical Officer of Health coverage for RCDHU recently. Likewise, I also

had the opportunity to provide coverage for NBPSDHU. This coverage occurred when NBPSDHU responded to its first local measles case since 1995, and I was able to work with their excellent team to support the public health response. Lessons learned from this work at NBPSDHU are being applied to our measles preparedness work here at RCDHU. We anticipate this collaborative relationship will continue to strengthen our regional public health capacity.

Respiratory Infections

Test percent positivity shows that COVID-19 and RSV activity have been declining and remained at low or moderate levels for the last 7 weeks. Influenza activity had been very high as of the last report but appears to have peaked in early February and has been decreasing since then. Flu is now at a moderate level; however, it is important to note that influenza B activity often increases around this time.

Hospital bed occupancy due to respiratory illness had been at very high levels for several weeks, with most hospitalizations related to flu in the latter part of the season. After 19 weeks of high or very high levels, hospital bed occupancy came down to moderate levels at the end of February. Emergency department visits related to respiratory illness have remained at very high levels for the past 20 weeks; however, activity has been slowly declining over the last 8 weeks.

In 2025 so far, there has been an average of two new respiratory illness outbreaks per week. COVID-19 accounted for ~18% of outbreaks, RSV accounted for ~12% of outbreaks, flu accounted for ~35% of outbreaks, and other seasonal respiratory illnesses accounted for the rest of the outbreaks (~35%).

HEALTH PROMOTION

Renfrew County and District Drug Strategy (RCDDS)

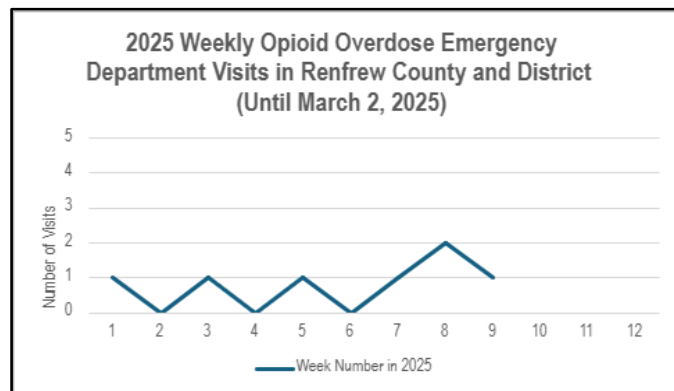
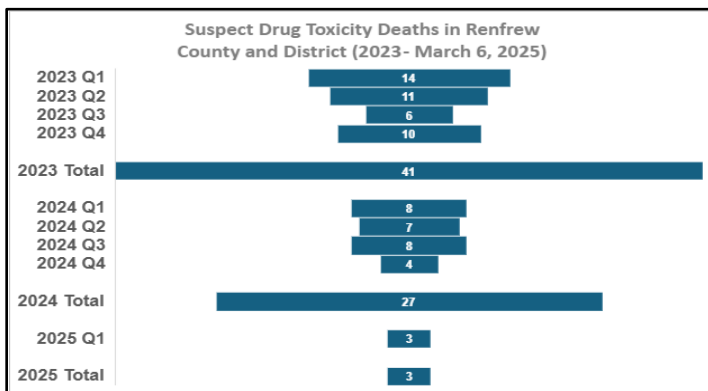
At the February RCDDS steering committee meeting, the Community Safety Pillar Report was presented and the four priorities they recommended were approved as proposed. Additionally, five strategy-level priorities were identified that address the overarching themes of stigma, communication, language of choice, cultural safety and surveillance.

When the Community Engagement Survey closed at the end of February, 180 people had responded. A summary of the responses will be included with the strategy.

The full draft strategy will be shared the steering committee on March 21, 2025, for their final endorsement. Following their approval, the RCDDS will be publicly released on April 1, 2025. You'll be able to follow the release here: <https://www.rcdhu.com/rcdds/> as well as on social media.

RCDDS Substance Use Harms Indicators:

As of March 6, 2025, there were three suspect drug toxicity deaths so far this year in RCD. Since the previous report, there has been a correction to the Emergency Department (ED) visits. As of March 2, 2025, there have been 7 ED visits by RCD residents related to opioid overdose.



STOP on the Net (SOTN)

Recognizing that social media is a powerful tool to reach adults in Ontario who are looking to quit smoking, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) offered a social media advertising reimbursement campaign to help Public Health Units promote the SOTN smoking cessation program. RCDHU implemented targeted ad buys on social media (Facebook and Instagram) for individuals 18 years and over who live in Renfrew County and District. This 5-day campaign ran from February 3 to February 8 inclusive, and resulted in 562 link clicks, 18,213 individual accounts reached, and 42,941 total views.

The Ottawa Hospital Regional Hepatitis Program – Hepatitis C Outreach Nurse Partnership

RCDHU has partnered with The Ottawa Hospital (TOH) Regional Hepatitis Program. TOH will be sending a hepatitis C Outreach nurse on a bi-weekly basis to join RCDHU's Outreach team. The collaboration will help identify at risk populations who require additional treatment and care for hepatitis C, as well as assist with referrals to a hepatitis Specialist.

Nursing Student Placements at RCDHU

RCDHU has an affiliation agreement with Algonquin College – Waterfront Campus to support nursing student placements within the four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) program, which is affiliated with the University of Ottawa. The students are assigned to an RCDHU public health nurse (PHN) preceptor for the duration of their placement. The students are also supported to shadow other programs to enrich their learning experience and gain a better understanding of public health nursing.

In the fall of 2024, a group of students completed a project to address community concerns regarding improperly discarded sharps and drug paraphernalia, based on community needs and feedback from local businesses. The students created an educational video and an infographic for social media covering safe disposal steps and local disposal sites.

Over a 10-week period from January 2025 to April 2025, RCDHU staff will preceptor two 4th year consolidation students, one in the harm reduction program and one in the vaccine preventable diseases (VPD) program.

In the harm reduction program, the student will participate in all aspects of the program, including outreach, SPRITE, assisting with clinic preparation, and documentation of site visits. In addition, the student will attend all team meetings and meetings with external partners.

In the VPD program, the student will conduct community surveillance and assessments of school-aged children who are overdue for immunizations, as per the Immunization of School Pupils Act

(ISPA). The student will help plan and deliver community immunization clinics, including vaccinating overdue students, communications with community partners & parent/legal guardians directly affected by enforcement activities under the ISPA.

In addition to practicing their technical skills, these public health nursing experiences enable the students to strengthen nursing skills such as client education, communication, enhancing community partnerships, and working with vulnerable populations.

You're the Chef

This month, RCDHU is pleased to support the launch of three new You're the Chef (YTC) programs in local schools for students in grades 5-8, an exciting milestone for our team. YTC is a train-the-trainer food literacy program that empowers educators and volunteers to teach hands-on cooking skills, meal preparation, and basic nutrition aligned with Canada's Food Guide. To support program delivery, we provided teachers with a comprehensive binder of YTC resources, aprons, curriculum connections to subjects like math, geography, and languages, and cooking kits with essential supplies. By equipping educators with the tools they need, we are fostering students' confidence in cooking while reinforcing key educational concepts through real-world learning. These program launches mark an important step in strengthening food skills and empowering youth to make nutritious choices, reflecting our commitment to improving food literacy and healthy eating in our community.

Submitted by: Dr. Jason Morgenstern
Medical Officer of Health
Renfrew County and District Health Unit