



# Renfrew County and District Health Unit

*"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"*

## **Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board**

Tuesday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### **Health Promotion Highlights**

#### *Strengthening Families Program*

The Strengthening Families Program (SFP) is a nine-week, evidence-based, skill-building program for teens aged 12-16 and their parents. The goal of the program is to increase protective factors and reduce the risk factors that lead to both substance abuse and youth depression. The spring session started this April, the first time that it has been feasible to run the program since the beginning of the pandemic. It is an excellent example of returning to much-needed health promotion programming and of collaborating with partners.

The program is implemented by a team of four facilitators. Staff currently delivering the program include: the site coordinator (Manager of the Renfrew County Youth Wellness Hub), three social worker facilitators from the Phoenix Centre, Addiction Treatment Services (ATS) through the Renfrew Victoria Hospital, and a Health Promoter from the Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU).

Each of the nine weeks covers a different topic, including positive attention, communication, clear expectations, setting and supporting goals, fair limits, handling stress and anger, and problem solving. The sessions are 3 hours long, one night per week. The first hour is spent enjoying a healthy family meal together. Once the family meal is finished, youth and their parents participate in separate sessions during which they discuss a range of topics. In the final hour, both youth and parents come together to build on the topics and skills they've explored separately.

In addition to dinner, participants receive transportation tokens (if required), childcare for siblings under the age of 12, prizes for participating, and a certificate for completing the program.

In the past, SFP took place twice per year, with the first session occurring in Pembroke while the second took place in Renfrew. The Pembroke program for this year is at the Youth Wellness Hub. A fall session is currently being planned. For more information about the program, visit <https://strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org/>.

## Health Protection Highlights

### *Immunization*

By May 30<sup>th</sup>, RCDHU will conclude all immunization surveillance efforts related to the *Immunization of School Pupils Act* (ISPA) for the 2022-23 school year. As a result of active surveillance and vaccination efforts, the number of students who are not up to date with their vaccines has decreased from approximately 4250 to 2100 as of May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

In May 2023, RCDHU started to work with licensed childcare facility operators to support them with immunization surveillance, as required under the *Child Care and Early Years Act*. To date, RCDHU has connected with 10 out of 26 licensed childcare operators and plans to reach out to the remaining 16 operators by the end of June 2023.

RCDHU's vaccine inventory team has started to plan annual cold chain inspections for all facilities that order and store publicly funded vaccines in Renfrew County and District. It is anticipated that approximately 125 vaccine storage units will need to be inspected in 2023. These cold chain inspections are planned to occur from June to September 2023.

### *Healthy Environments*

The Healthy Environments program's focus is shifting to summer inspections and work activities. RCDHU staff are conducting active tick surveillance (tick dragging) in May at 6 locations, covering both urban and rural areas. The general locations include Renfrew, Griffith, Pembroke, and Petawawa. Places that have already been identified as risk areas for the spread of Lyme Disease from ticks are Arnprior, Calabogie, Cobden, and Eganville. RCDHU continues to receive submissions of ticks that were attached to humans for both species identification and testing for diseases of public health significance. So far this year, RCDHU has submitted 20 ticks for testing. We are also raising public awareness of tick submissions through social media.

Under the rabies program, RCDHU is planning to run a dog bite prevention campaign over the next few weeks called the *Yellow Ribbon Campaign*. The initiative encourages owners to tie a yellow ribbon around their dog's collar or leash to indicate that they need a bit of space (e.g., due to being in training, post-op, or nervous). The objective is to lower the number of dog bite incidents, which can cause injury and often result in the need to provide rabies immunizations. A media release and social media posts will support this endeavour and we will work with pet stores and veterinary clinics to broadcast the message.

### *Infectious Diseases*

After a brief increase in local COVID-19 activity following the Easter weekend, indicators demonstrate activity has now returned to a relatively low level. For example, over the past 2 weeks (May 5-18), approximately 20 new cases have been reported. This corresponds to an average weekly rate of <10 per 100,000 individuals, which is similar to

the provincial rate. Additionally, local percent positivity continues to decrease and is currently at 4.2%. Local wastewater signals are also trending downward with signals from recent weeks being the lowest observed since late May 2022.

A total of 5 COVID-19 outbreaks were declared between April 21-May 8 and have all since been closed. While no additional confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks have been declared within the past 10 days (May 9-May 18), the Outbreak Management Team continues to respond to suspect outbreaks and inquiries. The case and contact management team at RCDHU is also preparing for the departure of Provincial Work Force staff, which will occur over the next few weeks.

With respect to other respiratory infections, local influenza activity remains low and stable. There is one ongoing respiratory outbreak at a long-term care home that is being actively monitored.

At provincial and regional levels, indicators of COVID-19 and other respiratory virus activity remain low and stable.

## **MOH Activities**

Over the past month, I continued to focus on learning about the local context, building relationships, and getting to know RCDHU and our partners. Our communications team arranged social media posts and a video to introduce me as the new medical officer of health to the community. Furthermore, I contributed to panel discussions at community events that addressed the impacts of homelessness, income, and social services on health. I introduced myself to Renfrew County Council and Pembroke Regional Hospital leaders. I also went on several community visits, including to the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan, Killaloe Community Resource Centre, and St. Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry's Bay. In the coming weeks, further visits and introductions are planned, including North Renfrew County, Chalk River Laboratories, South Algonquin, City of Pembroke Council, and Arnprior Regional Health. I would like to thank our partners for being very welcoming and helping me to grow my understanding of the region.

Submitted by: Dr. Jason Morgenstern  
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