



Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board

Tuesday, February 27, 2024

Health Promotion

Public Health Nurse-Delivered Group Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) for Postpartum Depression

Description of Program:

Public Health Nurse (PHN)-delivered group Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based intervention for postpartum depression. Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) will be implementing PHN-led CBT Workshops for clients within Renfrew County and District (RCD) who are pregnant or less than 18-months postpartum. These workshops provide an effective, brief option for birthing parents, reducing postpartum depression and anxiety, as well as improving social support, the mother-infant relationship, and positive affectivity/surgency in offspring.

Components of the workshop include both cognitive and behavioural techniques, which will provide psychoeducation and support to clients. As a result of the workshop, there is also an opportunity for participant referral to the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) Program at RCDHU. Follow-up with participants is included to provide additional support and guidance. There is the option for both virtual and in-person workshop delivery, depending on the needs of the RCD community. Due to the versatility of the workshop, there is a future opportunity for community partnership to ensure reach to vulnerable populations within RCD that meet workshop eligibility.

Description of Team:

PHNs assigned to program areas within Health Promotion at RCDHU are being trained to facilitate the program. In addition, a team lead will provide ongoing support and assistance with developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the workshop.

Preventing and Reducing Substance Use Related Harms

Our substance use and harm reduction team continues planning to support the development of a community-wide drug strategy. We will be hosting the first Opioid Overdose Response Plan team meeting of the year in early March. These are regularly scheduled meetings between community partners to monitor and respond to the

changing drug-related harms situation across RCD. In addition to the usual updates, we will be asking members to provide initial input on a community drug strategy. Furthermore, we will continue this discussion at the substance use collective action summit being planned later in March. A comprehensive strategy will address prevention (including as this relates to housing and mental health), harm reduction, treatment, and enforcement and require extensive intersectoral community participation.

The establishment of the MESA initiative involving the County of Renfrew paramedic services, community services, and development and property is an exciting advance with the potential to enhance our collaborative community efforts. In addition to upstream approaches, the initiative includes a mobile services component for the most vulnerable in our community that will provide wrap-around medical, harm reduction, and social services support. We look forward to continuing to support these initiatives through Public Health's preventive and harm reduction lens.

Health Protection

Healthy Environments

Rabies:

The rabies virus infects mammals' nervous system and can be spread to humans through the bites or scratches of infected animals. After the bite or scratch of a potentially infected animal, rabies can be prevented through timely treatment. Once rabies symptoms appear, the disease is almost universally fatal, regardless of the treatment offered. Therefore, preventive work is essential.

Our healthy environments team plays an integral role in preventing rabies through follow-up after all animal exposure incidents, which require reporting to Public Health. Depending on the incident, follow-up includes doing a risk assessment for rabies exposure, surveillance of involved domestic animals, animal rabies testing, and arranging treatment. A potential rabies exposure is defined as a bite from a mammal, non-bite (scratch or contact with saliva) from a mammal, or direct contact with a bat. Prompt cleaning of any wound is always essential. Depending on the risk-level of the incident, vaccination and administration of antibodies (i.e., immunoglobulin) may be required. These treatments are called post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and should be started as soon as possible after the exposure. PEP treatments typically take 14 days to complete.

Public Health Inspectors investigate and respond to all animal exposure incidents. In 2023, 238 exposure incidents were investigated, with 25 incidents requiring PEP. Some of the animals involved were bats, dogs, cats, groundhogs, and raccoons.

RCDHU staff plan to run the Yellow-Ribbon Campaign for rabies prevention later this Spring. The campaign asks that dog owners place a yellow ribbon or collar on their pets to remind people to ask before petting, to prevent avoidable animal biting incidents. The campaign also educates the general public on the significance of the yellow ribbon or yellow dog collar. The first year of the campaign in 2023 was a social media success with many pet stores and veterinary clinics taking part.

Upcoming Seasonal Activities:

With the approach of spring weather, special attention is being paid to monitoring the freshet (spring ice melt) in March.

Warmer weather also brings renewed outdoor interactions with ticks. Tick dragging will occur once again this year, with RCDHU staff targeting locations bordering risk areas and near waterways to get a better sense of the spread of ticks in RCD.

Immunization

COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccine:

As the winter season has progressed, demand for both COVID-19 and flu vaccines has decreased. Both vaccines remain accessible through participating pharmacies, some primary care providers, and RCDHU booked appointments for children under 12 and those at higher risk. As of February 3rd, RCDHU has administered 7840 doses of COVID-19 vaccine, and 3742 doses of influenza vaccine via mass community-based clinics, in-home vaccination services, and mobile vaccination services to retirement homes and congregate care settings. As of February 3rd, pharmacies in RCD have administered 11,884 doses of COVID-19 vaccines and as of February 7th, 14,179 doses of influenza vaccine.

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Vaccine:

RCDHU continues to work with eligible partners to promote and administer of the RSV vaccine. As of February 12th, RCDHU has supported 3 mobile immunization clinics to eligible facilities and hosted 2 community clinics, resulting in a total of 160 doses of RSV vaccine being administered. RCDHU also supports the distribution of the RSV vaccine to eligible health care partners. As of February 12th, approximately 500 doses of vaccine have been distributed.

Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA):

ISPA work continues to occur throughout the winter months in RCD. As of February 17th, 2911 students were overdue for at least one ISPA vaccine (forecasted until June) or missing immunization information. Over the prior two weeks (Jan 28-Feb 17), approximately 500 students were brought up-to-date on their immunizations. RCDHU

anticipates seeing a further decrease in the number of overdue students in the coming weeks as the RCDHU immunization team will be hosting school-based clinics in all 11 high schools across RCD, and community-based clinics for students to attend. Both school and community-based clinics are planned to occur until the end of March 2024. 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.

Invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) Infections

RCDHU, Canada as whole, and multiple other countries have noted significant increases in iGAS infections over the past year. Typical, non-invasive group A streptococcus infections are relatively common (e.g., strep throat) and are not reported to the Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU). In rare cases, the group A streptococcus bacterium becomes more serious and invasive, infecting the blood, tissues, or muscle. These iGAS infections are reported to RCDHU to enable monitoring and actions to protect others from infection. In 2023, 20 iGAS cases were reported, compared to an average of 6 cases reported each year from 2019-2022.

The increase in iGAS infections is likely related to multiple different factors and is not completely understood. Changes in respiratory virus infection patterns may be partly responsible, as these illnesses increase the risk of group A streptococcus infection. Another contributing factor may be reduced exposure to group A streptococcus over recent years due to measures used to control COVID-19, which also reduced the spread of many other infectious diseases. This may have resulted in a temporary decline in immunity against group A streptococcus, and therefore more susceptibility last year. Finally, an increasing trend of invasive group A streptococcus across Ontario was apparent in the years before the pandemic. While measures used to control COVID-19 were associated with a reduction in invasive group A streptococcus, we may now be seeing a continuation of this previous trend.

People most at risk include those with chronic medical conditions, people with weakened immune systems, older adults, and young children. Severe, invasive infections from group A streptococcus remain uncommon, however, it is important to be alert and take precautions. Important precautions to reduce the risk of a group A streptococcus infection include:

- Frequent hand washing, especially before preparing or eating meals and after coughing or sneezing,
- Keeping wounds clean and monitoring for signs of infection, such as marked pain, redness, swelling, and drainage,
- Being vaccinated against viral illnesses that increase the risk of a group A streptococcus infection, including chickenpox, COVID-19 and the flu.

Anyone who is concerned about a group A streptococcal infection should act quickly and seek advice from their healthcare provider, Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre (RC VTAC), or Health811.

- Prolonged fever and sore throat or fever and sore throat without associated cold symptoms (like cough and runny nose) are typical group A streptococcus symptoms.
- Rapidly worsening symptoms or severe symptoms such as trouble breathing, difficulty swallowing, or confusion should prompt emergency medical attention.

Respiratory Infections

Outbreaks:

Respiratory-related outbreak activity so far in 2024 has remained relatively consistent, with an average of 2 new respiratory outbreaks declared each week. There are currently 3 active respiratory outbreaks in RCD (as of February 13th).

Respiratory Disease Outcomes:

Some people are at higher risk of more severe disease or outcomes from respiratory illness infection than others. In the past 6 weeks, hospitalizations for COVID-19 have decreased to approximately 4 new admissions per week, down from 7-8 new admissions in November-December 2023. Hospitalizations for influenza continue to be reported by local hospitals.

RCDHU continues to review fatalities related to COVID-19 as information becomes available. Since November 2023, RCDHU has confirmed 14 COVID-19-related deaths.

Test Percent Positivity and Cases:

As of February 13th, a total of 31 influenza cases have been reported to RCDHU. Provincially, percent positivity for influenza A appears to have peaked in late December 2023 and currently sits around 10%. Percent positivity for influenza B remains low but has increased in recent weeks.

With respect to COVID-19, over the past few weeks, testing percent positivity for both Ontario and Eastern Region health units has been trending downward (9-10%). Our local positivity has also been decreasing, currently around 15% and is projected to decrease below 10% in the next week or so.

Wastewater:

Preliminary data for Ontario overall and for Eastern Region health units shows that COVID-19 wastewater signals are decreasing after peaking mid-end December 2023. Local signals from both Pembroke and Petawawa sites show a similar trend.

In addition to monitoring COVID-19 signals in wastewater, RCDHU is monitoring influenza signals this 2023-2024 season. Increases in influenza A signals were observed at both Pembroke and Petawawa sampling mid-December 2023, a few weeks prior to the first influenza A outbreak declared in January 2024. Supported by other influenza-related indicators, recent wastewater signals suggest that influenza continues to circulate in our communities.

Sexual Health - GetaKit

GetaKit is a University of Ottawa initiative aiming to assess the effectiveness and outcomes of a mailout HIV self-testing program. Launched in July 2020, the online platform provides Ontario residents with the accessibility of ordering an HIV test kit online to be completed in the privacy of their homes.

Since its launch, the GetaKit program has evolved to offer additional services beyond HIV testing. The program facilitates lab requisitions ordered by local Medical Officers of Health for chlamydia and gonorrhea testing, which can be conducted in local laboratories.

To ensure appropriate testing recommendations, individuals are required to complete a questionnaire prior to any testing. Based on this information, the program determines the types of testing suitable for the individual's needs.

Given the potential to enhance accessibility of testing and reduce spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI), last September RCDHU was the third public health unit across Ontario to join the Getakit program, making it available to RCD residents. In support of the program, our STI treatment medical directives were updated and our staff were provided with training. RCDHU will provide any RCD resident with a positive test result with assistance on education and obtaining treatment.

As of February 10th, GetaKit has successfully served 29 RCD residents. Since promotion of the program only began recently, we anticipate increased uptake in the months to come.

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