



Renfrew County and District Health Unit

"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"

Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board

Tuesday, November 28th, 2023

Health Protection

Respiratory Illness

Local respiratory illness activity is [high](#). Similar to Provincial and regional trends, the number of individuals visiting an emergency department (ED) for respiratory-related concerns is increasing in Renfrew County and District (RCD). Locally, the proportion of ED visits specifically for respiratory-related concerns continues to rise, particularly among children and youth aged 0-17.

COVID-19:

In recent weeks, COVID-19 activity has remained high. COVID-19-specific indicators that monitor hospitalizations, test percent positivity, and wastewater signals have generally been indicating "high" or "very high" activity on the [Respiratory Illness Data Summary](#). At the time of this report, there are 6 active COVID-19 outbreaks in RCD.

Influenza:

Provincially, influenza activity remains low but weekly case numbers and test percent positivity are increasing. No cases of influenza (A or B) have been reported to RCDHU so far this 2023-2024 season.

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV):

Provincial and regional test percent positivity for RSV continue to increase. Although no RSV outbreaks have been confirmed in local institutions so far this season, there is evidence that RSV is circulating in our communities, as indicated by a few RSV-related hospitalizations.

Immunization (COVID-19, Flu, and RSV)

As of November 11th, Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) administered 5102 doses of COVID-19 vaccine and 2577 doses of influenza vaccine in mass community-based clinics and through mobile vaccination services to retirement homes and congregate care settings. RCDHU has dispensed a total of 19 625 doses of influenza vaccine to health care partners across Renfrew County and District (RCD). Pharmacies continue to be an active channel for the public to receive both COVID-19 and influenza vaccine. As of November 16th, pharmacies in RCD have administered approximately 6255 doses of COVID-19 vaccine and 9241 doses of influenza vaccine.

Immunization (General Program)

The first round of Grade 7 school immunization clinics for Hepatitis B (HB), meningococcal disease, and human papilloma virus (HPV) have been completed. In total, 40 school-based clinics were hosted across RCD with approximately 1000 students who were eligible for immunizations. In total, 725 doses of HPV vaccine, 702 doses of HB vaccine, and 815 doses of Meningococcal vaccine were administered at these school-based clinics. In addition to school-based clinics, students may choose to be vaccinated through their health care provider or by [booking an appointment](#) at an RCDHU routine immunization clinic. The second round of grade 7 school immunization clinics will be planned to start in the spring of 2024.

Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA) surveillance has been initiated for the 2023-2024 school year. Approximately 15 458 students are enrolled in schools across RCD this year. RCDHU is currently missing immunization information for 738 of these students. No information immunization notices will start to be mailed out to these students in November, requesting that an immunization record be submitted to RCDHU by the end of December. Further ISPA surveillance activities for 2024 continue to be planned, in collaboration with school board partners.

Healthy Environments

Healthy Environments inspection staff continue to focus on inspections of food establishments, personal services settings, public swimming pools and spas, and small drinking water systems. Additionally, they have completed annual inspections of Community Living housing throughout RCD.

RCDHU continues to offer the food handler training certification program. These courses are offered in partnership with local high schools, organizations such as Royal Canadian Legions, and community employment services. So far in 2023, health inspectors have offered 13 courses and issued 448 food handler certificates.

Social Media Highlights:

Healthy Environments shared important information on social media to remind residents that home-based food operators also require public health approval before operating, similar to retail food businesses.

RCDHU is actively promoting Radon Awareness Month for November through information sharing and promoting radon testing in private dwellings. For more information, visit: <https://takeactiononradon.ca/test-for-radon/radon-test-kits/>.

Health Promotion

Alcohol and Health Update

On January 17th, 2023, The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction issued *Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health*, replacing *Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines* (LRDGs) issued in 2011.

The new recommendations reflect advances in research and understanding of alcohol and health over the past decade. Previously, under the LRDGs, recommendations were based on numerical limits for weekly and daily amounts of alcohol consumption. The new guidance differs from the previous guidelines in communicating clearly that any amount of alcohol poses some risk to health, which increases according to the amount of alcohol consumed. To help people make an informed decision about a reduction in alcohol consumption, the 2023 guidance presents a continuum of risk, as outlined in the following graphic:



It is also important to avoid binge drinking, and the guidance recommends no more than 2 drinks on a given day. For more information visit: <https://www.ccsa.ca/canadas-guidance-alcohol-and-health#canada-s-guidance-on-alcohol-and-health>.

Drink Less, Live More Campaign:

To accompany Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health (CGAH), the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released the *Drink Less, Live More* digital campaign in early October 2023.

Aligning with the principle of autonomy and the harm reduction approach set out in CGAH, the premise behind the campaign is to promote that any reduction in the

amount of alcohol consumed can help improve health, and that it is everyone's right to know.

The *Drink Less, Live More* campaign has been actively promoted on RCDHU's social media accounts throughout October and November 2023, and contains a series of images including the tag line "Drink Less, Live more." The bright, playful ads ask people to consider what they could be enjoying more of if they were to drink less.



Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP) Proposal

In collaboration with the Ottawa Valley Ontario Health Team, RCDHU hosted a Substance Use Collective Action Planning meeting on September 19th for community partners representing addiction treatment, mental health, education, housing, childcare, healthcare, emergency services, law enforcement and municipal sectors. The objective of the meeting was to bring together partners to identify priority areas of need for a program for a SUAP proposal that would expand and/or integrate substance use services. As a result, the need for a mobile substance use service was identified as the priority for the proposal submitted on November 22nd, 2023. For more information on the SUAP visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/canadian-drugs-substances-strategy/funding/substance-use-addictions-program/contribution-funding.html>.

The purpose of the project is to design and implement an integrated mobile substance use service in partnership with the existing Community Withdrawal Management Service (CWMS), community paramedics, hospitals, RCDHU, and new peer support staff to provide services across RCD. Referrals to this mobile service will come from hospital emergency departments, inpatient units, residential substance use treatment programs, community programs and the justice system. Walk-ins and self-referrals will also be accepted.

The mobile service will integrate the high quality but sometimes siloed services that have historically been provided in the region. While the integration aspect of this project distinguishes it, adding a central role for peer workers is another overarching factor. In most cases, a client's first interaction with the service will be with a peer worker, thereby reducing the effect of stigma and non-client centred care.

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