



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

Tuesday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024

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### **Health Protection**

#### **Immunization Program**

##### *COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccination:*

The first allocations of COVID-19 and Influenza vaccines were received by RCDHU during the first week of October. Vaccine distribution to hospitals, long term care homes, and healthcare providers began shortly after, focusing on vaccinating high-risk and priority populations. From October 11<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> RCDHU hosted 9 community based COVID-19 and influenza clinics for high-risk and priority populations and will continue to offer additional clinics throughout the fall. To further support the vaccination of priority groups, RCDHU will be providing mobile COVID-19 and influenza clinics for retirement homes and congregate settings.

Beginning October 28<sup>th</sup>, COVID-19 and Influenza vaccines will be available to everyone 6 months of age and older at RCDHU clinics, participating pharmacies, and healthcare providers. Vaccination remains an essential way to prevent respiratory illnesses for all Renfrew County and District (RCD) residents and to protect those most vulnerable in our communities.

##### *Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Vaccination:*

##### **Older Adult High-risk Program**

The RCDHU immunization team has been supporting the administration of RSV vaccine to older high-risk adults via mobile clinics in retirement homes. As of October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 9 out of 11 mobile clinics had been completed, with the remaining clinics being planned for the remainder of the month. Additionally, RSV vaccine is available for eligible individuals through their healthcare provider or by booking an appointment at an RCDHU clinic. For more information, visit <https://www.rcdhu.com/healthy-living/respillnesses/>.

## Infant and High-risk Children Program

The first allocation of the new RSV passive immunization agent for infants, nirsevimab (also known as Beyfortus®), was received by RCDHU in the second week of October. All infants under 12 months of age are eligible, as well as certain high risk children up to 24 months old. Residents can access nirsevimab prior to discharge from their birthing hospital, through their healthcare provider, or at an RCDHU clinic. Additionally, pregnant women between 32-36 weeks gestation who are expected to deliver near or during RSV season are eligible for an RSV vaccine. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommends prioritizing nirsevimab for infants due to its effectiveness, long-lasting protection, and favorable safety profile, rather than vaccinating pregnant individuals.

### *Grade 7 School Based Immunization Clinics:*

The first round of school-based Grade 7 immunization clinics for hepatitis B, meningococcal disease, and human papillomavirus vaccines is ongoing. As of October 11<sup>th</sup>, 18 school-based clinics were completed. These clinics will continue throughout October, with a target completion date of the first week of November.

## **Healthy Environments**

### *Environmental Public Health Week:*

National Environmental Public Health Week was celebrated this year from September 23<sup>rd</sup> -29<sup>th</sup>. This week acknowledges the hard work and efforts of public health inspectors and other environmental health professionals in protecting residents from the risks and impacts of foodborne and waterborne illness, vector borne diseases, rabies, climate change, environmental disasters, and other health hazards.

### *Vector Borne Disease Surveillance and Control:*

Active surveillance for ticks began in September and continues through October. However, tick dragging efforts were limited in September and early October due to unfavorable weather conditions.

### *Recreational Water Inspections:*

The third round of inspections for year-round indoor recreational water facilities (pools and spas) was completed by the end of September. The fourth round of inspections is scheduled for completion by the end of December, as year-round public pools and spas require a minimum of four compliance inspections annually.

### *Small Drinking Water Systems (SDWS) Inspections:*

Public health inspectors are currently conducting inspections of seasonal SDWS ahead of their winter shutdown. Many of these systems operate from May to October, and inspectors are working diligently to ensure priority systems are inspected before the close of the 2024 season.

## **Infectious Diseases**

### *Respiratory Illness Activity:*

Respiratory-related outbreak activity increased significantly in September, peaking with an average of three new outbreaks declared each week. COVID-19 remained the dominant pathogen, responsible for approximately 64% of individual infections.

No influenza cases have been reported to RCDHU so far this season and influenza activity has remained low both locally and provincially since mid-May. In contrast, COVID-19 positivity rates have been high in RCD, correlating with our increased outbreak activity. Provincially, COVID-19 activity remains moderate and is lower than what has been observed in RCD.

The rate of hospital admissions due to respiratory illness is high, with an average of 2-3 admissions per week. Respiratory-related emergency department visits have been increasing gradually over the past two weeks, reaching a moderate level.

Overall respiratory illness activity, particularly involving COVID-19, has been high since late summer. While recent data shows a small decline in both outbreaks and hospitalizations, the overall impact from respiratory illnesses is expected to increase throughout November and December.

## **Health Promotion**

### **School Health and Wellbeing**

To coincide with the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, RCDHU launched its [Tools for Educators](#) webpage. It is a digital collection of educational resources and materials to assist educators with effectively delivering the Ontario Health and Physical Education Curriculum with evidence-based lessons.

RCDHU distributed its Fall School Newsletter to all educators in RCD on September 21<sup>st</sup>. Some of the topics highlighted were the You're the Chef food literacy program, school-based immunization programs, tick borne-disease prevention, education on safe routes

to schools, and vaping prevention and cessation supports for the implementation of [Policy/Procedure 128: The Provincial Code of Conduct](#) (PPM 128).

Also, in support of PPM 128, RCDHU developed and distributed a comprehensive School Vaping Resource to support educators with teaching vaping related curriculum and to increase awareness of legislation and enforcement, as well as cessation supports that are available to those who want to quit.

The school team identified the importance of providing parents and guardians with safe school travel resources and information during the week leading up to the first day of school and subsequent weeks as bussing was unavailable for students in the Renfrew County District School Board (RCDSB) and the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board (RCCDSB).

### **Syphilis Point-of-care Rapid Testing and Immediate Treatment Evaluation (SPRITE) Program**

RCDHU continues to participate in a locally driven collaborative project led by Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Public Health to provide point of care testing to underserved populations.

The RCDHU outreach team has nearly surpassed their original target of providing testing services for 50 people prior to the end of 2024. As of October 8<sup>th</sup>, 44 individuals have been tested for syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis C through this program. The new goal is to provide testing for 75 individuals prior to the end of 2024. The team's outreach network is being expanded across the health unit area, with events scheduled in Barry's Bay, Arnprior, Renfrew, and at the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan Community Health Centre. The outreach aspect of the program has continued to provide valuable opportunities to connect with communities across Renfrew County and District and offer a broad range of other RCDHU services to individuals.

### **“Let's Grow” – Healthy Growth and Development Immunization Program Update**

In September, RCDHU expanded Let's Grow clinics to four locations across RCD: Pembroke, Barry's Bay, Renfrew, and Arnprior. Public health nurses in the Let's Grow program provide a well baby check, immunization, referral, and system navigation.

### **Renfrew County and District Drug Strategy**

In September, RCDHU chaired the fifth Steering Committee Meeting for the development and implementation of the Renfrew County and District Drug Strategy (RCDDS). At this meeting, the Steering Committee was provided with a report from the

Community Safety Working Group in addition to an update on the Joint Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan for the Upper Ottawa Valley.

The following five preliminary areas of focus were identified for the community safety pillar:

1. Enforcement
2. Social Order
3. Safe Disposal of Sharps
4. Communication
5. Complaint/Reporting Mechanism

On September 11<sup>th</sup> the RCCDS was publicly announced through a media release and webpage launch. Both can be found [here](#).

RCDDS partners submitted an Intent to Apply for the establishment of a Homelessness and Addictions Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub on September 20<sup>th</sup> and a final proposal, which was submitted on October 18<sup>th</sup>. Implementation and integration planning for mobile substance use services through Health Canada's Substance Use and Addiction Program (SUAP) is also ongoing.

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