



## Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board

January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2026

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### HEALTH PROTECTION

#### **Immunization**

##### *Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA):*

In December and early January 3809 notices were sent to students who were not up to date with vaccines required under ISPA. These students have until February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2026, to update their immunization status and send the information to RCDHU. As of January 16<sup>th</sup>, over 20% of students who received a notice had updated their vaccines and/or records as required under ISPA.

Immunizations can be accessed by booking an appointment with a health care provider, by attending a RCDHU high school clinic, or by booking an appointment at RCDHU's catch up clinics. Clinics are offered at various locations across Renfrew County and District. Appointments can be booked online via the online booking system or by calling the Immunization Intake Line. As of January 9<sup>th</sup>, RCDHU has hosted 5 out of 11 planned ISPA high school clinics, which will continue this month. It is important to note that immunizations administered through Health Care Providers must be reported by parents to RCDHU through the online Immunization Connect Ontario tool (ICON) or via email, mail, or fax.

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

The first round of Grade 7 school immunization clinics for Hepatitis B (HB), Meningococcal, and human papilloma virus (HPV) was completed on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025. A total of 39 school-based clinics were hosted across RCD with approximately 1100 students being eligible for immunizations. In total, 753 doses of HPV vaccine, 707 doses of HB vaccine, and 834 doses of Meningococcal vaccine were administered at these school-based clinics. Students may also choose to be vaccinated through their healthcare provider or by booking an appointment at an RCDHU routine immunization clinic. The second round of grade 7 school immunization clinics will start in the spring of 2026.

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

Compared to the 2024/25 season, RCDHU has administered 10% more doses of COVID-19 and 43% more doses of influenza vaccine this 2025/26 season. As of January 14<sup>th</sup>, RCDHU had administered 3796 doses of COVID-19 vaccine and 3633 doses of influenza vaccine through community-based clinics and mobile vaccination services to retirement homes and congregate care settings. RCDHU has also dispensed a total of 16 505 doses of influenza vaccine and 1932 doses of COVID-19 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 January 14<sup>th</sup>, pharmacies in RCD had administered approximately 8300 doses of COVID-19 vaccine. So far this season, approximately 28% of COVID-19 doses administered in RCD have been through RCDHU, with about 60% administered by pharmacies and 12% by other partners.

Fall 2025/26 COVID-19 vaccination coverage among older adults aged 65+ in RCD is 36%, which is higher compared to the rate in Ontario (32%). By the end of the 2024/25 season, local coverage in this age group reached 41%.

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

Between October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, and January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026, RCDHU administered 1144 doses of Adult RSV vaccine through community-based clinics and mobile vaccination services to retirement homes and congregate care settings. This is more than double the doses of Adult RSV vaccine administered by RCDHU at this time last season, which is largely due to expanded eligibility criteria. Vaccine is also available through health care providers, for which RCDHU has dispensed 3550.

#### *Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Infant and High-Risk Children:*

Between October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, and January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026, 202 doses of the passive immunization agent for infants, nirsevimab (also known as Beyfortus®) were administered to eligible infants and high-risk children by RCDHU and delivering hospitals. Coverage among newborns in RCD born October-December 2025 is approximately 70%. Additionally, RCDHU dispensed 382 doses to primary care physicians and continues to offer appointment-based community immunization clinics for eligible infants.

### **Safe Water – Private Drinking Water Testing**

In partnership with Public Health Ontario, RCDHU promotes a private well water testing service for residents of RCD to monitor for E. coli and total coliform bacteria in their drinking water supply. This service is especially valuable during times of flooding and drought. Private citizens collect their own samples using water bottles supplied by RCDHU and return filled samples to 5 designated locations across RCD (Barry's Bay, Laurentian Hills, McNab Braeside, Renfrew, and Pembroke). In 2025, a total of 4273 samples were processed at the laboratory. 3147 (74%) samples did not contain E. coli or total coliform bacteria. The RCDHU website offers many resources to assist clients with understanding water results and describes methods to remediate and maintain safe drinking water. Public health inspectors at RCDHU are also available to address drinking water concerns or questions.

### **Smoke-Free Ontario Act – Tobacco and Vape Retailer Enforcement**

Renfrew County and District Health Unit enforces the [Smoke-Free Ontario Act \(SFOA\), 2017](#) in workplaces, public places, schools, health care facilities, tobacco and vapour retailers, specialty vape stores, and other designated places. Public health inspectors conduct routine inspections, investigate complaints, and conduct youth access compliance checks. Tobacco and vape retailers are prohibited from selling and supplying tobacco and vapour products to anyone under 19 years old. RCDHU has completed a series of vape retailer and specialty vape store enforcement checks with youth test shoppers to determine compliance with sales to minors. A total of 60 vape retailers were inspected for sales to minors, along with 5 specialty vape stores. Six sales were committed (5 vape retailers and 1 specialty vape store). Follow-up enforcement checks with those

operators who attempted sales to individuals under the age of 19 are planned for 2026.

### ***Infection Prevention and Control – Outbreak Management***

RCDHU actively monitors infectious disease incidence in the community and in our institutions. All congregate care living and health care facilities are required to inform RCDHU of enteric disease outbreaks. In 2025, there were 14 institutional enteric outbreaks with three confirmed as norovirus to be the causative agent. For comparison, there were 9 confirmed institutional enteric outbreaks in 2024, and 5 confirmed outbreaks in 2023. So far, there have been 2 institutional enteric outbreaks in 2026. Public health inspectors work with our institutions to advise, inspect, and educate staff on best practices for preventing and controlling enteric outbreaks.

### ***Infectious Diseases***

Respiratory outbreak activity was low to moderate throughout November, steadily progressing to very high in the last 2 weeks of December. There was a total of 4 respiratory outbreaks in November versus 18 outbreaks in the month of December, with over 70% occurring in the second half of the month. Influenza A was the primary pathogen identified, with COVID-19 and unknown pathogens constituting the remaining percentage. The incidence rate of RSV was very low, with 1 outbreak throughout November and December.

Community cases of influenza were very high, with over 90 new cases for weeks 51 and 52, and 74 cases in week 53. The current seasonal influenza total is 307 cases. The likely peak for influenza activity occurred from December 14<sup>th</sup> to December 27<sup>th</sup>, and activity is beginning to slow. The first case of Influenza B was reported in the week of December 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>.

Hospital bed occupancy for respiratory illness remains very high since the second week of December. Respiratory-related emergency department visits remain very high, making up between 15% and 18% of total visits throughout the month of December.

## **HEALTH PROMOTION**

### ***Outreach Team and SPRITE Testing***

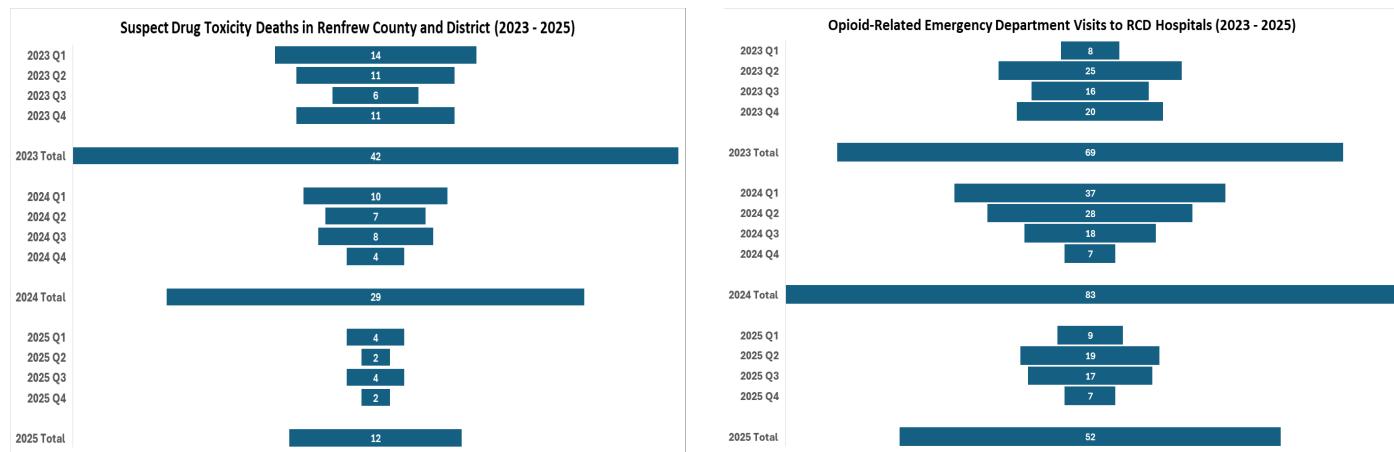
The Outreach Team continues to bring RCDHU services to clients across RCD and forge partnerships with community agencies. In 2025, the Outreach Team added three new community partners and now visits all food banks in RCD. Over the course of 2025, the Outreach Team completed 102 visits to 25 different locations across the county. During those visits, 522 naloxone kits were distributed, and 331 people were trained in their use. The team continues to provide harm reduction and sexual health supplies, offer sexual health testing, and connect clients to other RCDHU services or community partners where needed.

SPRITE testing continues to be offered at suitable Outreach Team events and at RCDHU's Pembroke office. As of January 14<sup>th</sup>, a total of 219 tests for syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis C have been completed under this program, with 102 of those tests being completed at Outreach locations. Individuals that tested positive have been successfully referred for follow-up and treatment. These clients tested are at high risk for acquiring sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections and do not have a family doctor or the means to seek out testing on their own.

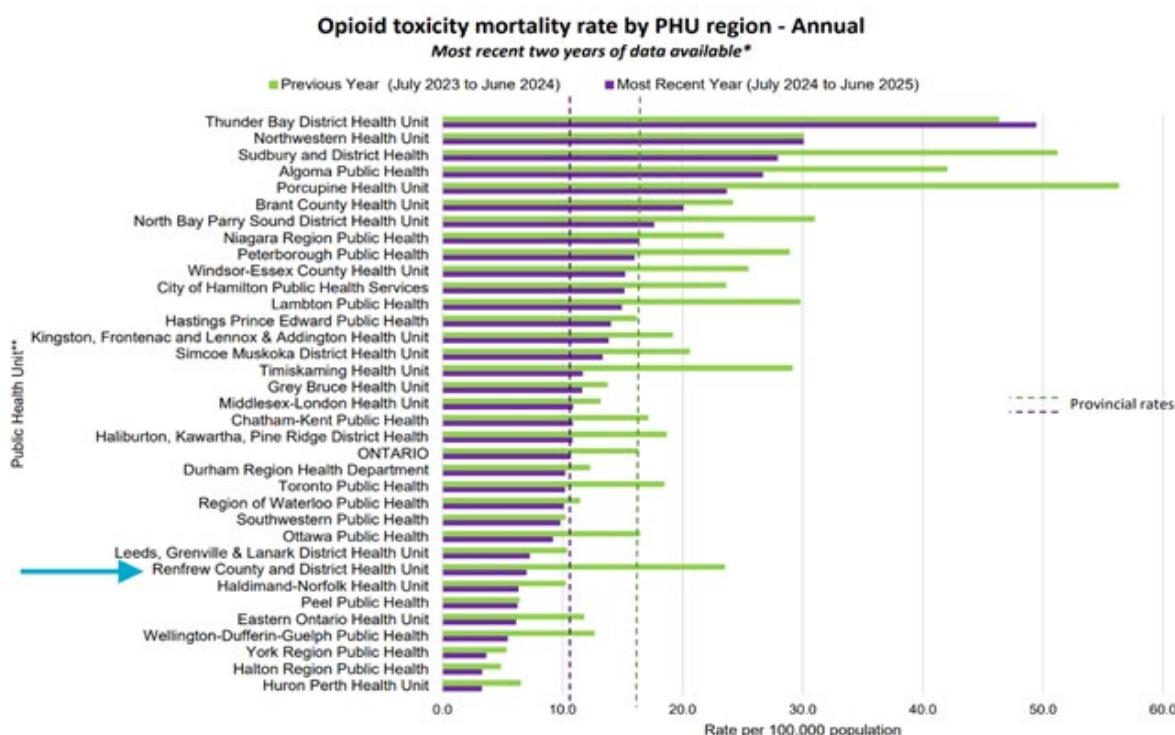
## Renfrew County and District Drug Strategy

With the beginning of 2026, it's important to recognize the tremendous efforts of all organizations, their staff, and clients in implementing many of the priorities of the Renfrew County and District Drug Strategy (RCDDS) in 2025.

The opioid crisis remains a complex public health issue, driven by the combination of several factors, including highly toxic synthetic opioids, socioeconomic impacts, and mental health challenges. Last year, RCD experienced a significant decrease in two key opioid-related metrics: deaths and emergency department visits. When compared to 2024, as of December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025, suspect drug toxicity deaths and opioid-related emergency department visits declined by 59% and 37% respectively.



Most Ontario Public Health Unit regions experienced a decline in their opioid toxicity mortality rate when comparing the most recent provincial data for the periods of July 2023 to June 2024, and July 2024 to June 2025; however, RCD's reduction in mortality rate was among the largest in the province.



While the dedicated, collaborative efforts of RCDDS partners have had a strong, positive impact on drug-related harms across our communities, ongoing vigilance is required. On January 15<sup>th</sup>, an [overdose alert](#) was issued. The alert was informed by both reporting from a community partner and the Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario. Preliminary data for January 2026 (to date) indicates a significant increase in drug toxicity related deaths relative to last year's monthly average of 1 death per month. The specific substances involved in the deaths are unknown at this time and we continue to monitor the situation closely.

### **Nutrition – You're the Chef**

You're the Chef (YTC) is a hands-on food literacy and cooking program for students in grades 5 to 8 that builds practical food skills, confidence with cooking, and connections to the Ontario curriculum. During the 2025–2026 school year, interest in YTC has increased significantly, with 19 schools expressing interest in the program. This includes 26 new teachers, in addition to two teachers who delivered YTC last year. To date, two YTC workshops have been completed and three new training sessions have been delivered, with additional training and program delivery anticipated as the school year continues.

This level of engagement represents substantial growth compared to the previous school year, when three training sessions were delivered across four schools and three schools implemented the program. Increased interest may reflect greater awareness of YTC among schools and educators. Feedback from teachers who have implemented YTC has been consistently positive, reinforcing both the demand for this programming and its alignment with public health priorities related to healthy eating, skill development, and long-term health outcomes for children and youth across RCD.

### **CATCH My Breath**

RCDHU's Substance Use Health Team participated in a research project evaluating the CATCH My Breath curriculum for preventing vaping among Ontario high school students. The study, approved by Ontario Tech University's Research Ethics Board and the Renfrew County and District School Board, involved:

- Parent consent forms and three short online surveys for students (before, 3 months after, and 12 months after the program), covering demographics and vaping attitudes/behaviors.
- Delivery of two 60-minute lessons by trained Public Health staff, focusing on vape components, health risks, social norms, and strategies to resist peer pressure.
- Participation from 3 schools (Barry's Bay – 2 classes, Deep River – 2 classes, and Opeongo – 1 class, ~28 students each) during November and December.
- The trained health unit staff also had to complete post-delivery questionnaires within 2 days of program delivery.

### **Bump to Baby – Online Prenatal Education Program**

RCDHU offers a free online prenatal program called Bump to Baby, in partnership with Southeast Public Health. This program can be completed at the client's own pace and gives the flexibility to learn when it's the most convenient. Information covered in Bump to Baby includes:

- Pregnancy
- Labour and delivery
- Feeding your baby

- Caring for your baby and keeping them safe
- Parenting
- Helpful services in Renfrew County and District

In addition to the information provided in the program, clients are offered a phone call for additional support from a Public Health Nurse. Clients register through our website by completing the Bump to Baby Online Prenatal Program Registration Form.

The program is promoted through social media (Facebook and X), as well as a [promotional poster](#) with a QR code available for printing and distribution.

Since RCDHU began offering the program in June 2025, 88 pregnant individuals have registered for the program.

### ***Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP)***

The OSDCP provides services to seniors (65+) who have a net family income below \$25 000 for a single senior, and \$41 500 for a couple. Seniors (65+) who are enrolled in the OSDCP can access services through RCDHU's dental clinic locations in Pembroke and Barry's Bay, or through our service level agreement providers throughout RCD. RCDHU dental clinics include regular hygiene visits, as well as dental services for routine checkups, emergencies, restorative care, or extractions.

In 2025, RCDHU administered 727 dental services appointments and 544 hygiene services appointments between the Barry's Bay and Pembroke clinic locations. RCDHU also coordinated denturist services for 70 seniors to receive either complete or partial dentures, depending on their individual needs.

As of July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025, 977 residents in RCD have received dental services through the OSDCP since the beginning of the program.

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