



Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board

May 26th, 2026

HEALTH PROTECTION

Immunization

Immunization of School Pupils Act (ISPA):

On April 15th, 2026, suspension orders under ISPA were implemented for 577 students aged 4–17 years (born 2008–2021). Public health staff collaborated closely with schools, families, and healthcare providers to support compliance with immunization requirements and facilitate timely return to school.

Comprehensive vaccination services were delivered through multiple models, including walk-in and appointment-based clinics, as well as in-home vaccination, where necessary. Prior to the suspension date, 49 community clinics and 14 high school clinics were conducted across the region. An additional 31 clinics were offered during the suspension period.

Over the 20-day suspension period, 532 students (92.2%) met their immunization requirements and were reinstated back to school as soon as compliance was confirmed. Students in Renfrew County and District (RCD) now have greater than 94% immunization coverage for each disease under ISPA. Measles immunization coverage among students in RCD is approximately 95%, which is the recommended threshold for community protection.

Grade 7 School-Based Immunization Program:

The second round of Grade 7 immunization clinics—covering Hepatitis B, Meningococcal, and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines—commenced March 5th, 2026, and will continue through early June.

Approximately 36 school-based clinics are being delivered across the region. As of May 12th, 2026, 23 clinics have been completed. Students may also access vaccines through their primary care provider or by booking an appointment at an RCDHU clinic.

COVID-19 Vaccination Campaign:

The spring COVID-19 vaccination campaign is underway from April through June 2026, targeting individuals at higher risk of infection.

Vaccines are available through participating pharmacies, healthcare providers, and public health clinics. As of May 12th, 2026, four mobile clinics have been completed in local retirement homes, with additional clinics scheduled throughout the month.

Healthy Environments

Infectious Diseases and Rabies Control Program:

RCDHU is running the Yellow Ribbon Campaign throughout May to encourage the use of a yellow ribbon, collar, or bandana on pets to signal that the animal requires space and should be approached with caution. The campaign is intended to reduce animal bites, associated emergency department visits, and the unnecessary use of rabies post-exposure prophylaxis. In collaboration with municipalities, veterinary clinics, and pet stores, the campaign has expanded to include additional community partners such as pet groomers, trainers, kennels, and other pet-focused agencies across Renfrew County and District. Promotional efforts have been strengthened through a partner social media toolkit and the distribution of new yellow-themed wearable materials for pets.

Food Safety Program:

A significant component of the Healthy Environments mandate is conducting food premises inspections. Public health inspectors have achieved a 100% completion rate during the first round of routine high-risk food premises inspections. High-risk establishments are those that serve vulnerable populations and prepare food involving multiple handling steps, placing them at increased risk of causing foodborne illness. Each high-risk facility is required to be routinely inspected at least once every four months. Inspections of moderate-risk food premises, such as fast-food restaurants, are also being prioritized to have at least one inspection completed by the end of June, in accordance with the Ontario Public Health Standards.

Safe Water Program:

Lead in drinking water continues to be an area of public interest across Ontario. The provincial approach in schools and licensed childcare centers relies on mandatory testing, flushing requirements, and longer-term replacement of lead-bearing plumbing. Under Ontario Regulation 243/07, schools and licensed childcare centers must test drinking water fixtures annually, focusing on taps and fountains used for drinking or food preparation. Where results exceed the provincial standard of 10 parts per billion (ppb), corrective actions are required, which may include flushing, restricting access, or replacing fixtures. Over the past two years, two of 47 schools tested in RCD had standing sample results above 10 ppb. Both schools have appropriate mitigation measures in place and have come into compliance. RCDHU receives notification of adverse lead results and public health inspectors respond immediately upon receipt.

Emergency Management

RCDHU has been actively involved in the freshet response and has participated in 14 freshet meetings with community partners to date. Partners include the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ottawa River Regulation Planning Board, Ontario Power Generation, Renfrew Power Generation, Emergency Management Ontario, Renfrew County, and municipalities within the RCDHU jurisdiction. While several communities along the main stem of the Ottawa River have experienced flooding in low-lying areas, affecting some residents, RCDHU continues to support residents through:

- Provision of safety information and water testing support to affected communities.
- Issuance of a media release on flood safety.

- Promotion of social media messaging focused on flood safety and drinking water safety.
- Sharing of Ministry of Natural Resources warnings as they are posted.

Local air quality monitoring remains a priority. RCDHU is developing partnerships to expand the network of air quality monitors across Renfrew County and District. In addition, a public toolkit is under development to help residents interpret air quality data and make informed public health decisions during air quality events.

Planning is underway to support the province in the event of potential First Nations evacuations this season. Staff are collaborating with Indigenous and government partners to develop a preliminary plan focused on meeting evacuees' health care needs and have participated in Ministry of Health planning meetings and regional discussions with Ontario Health East, the Ottawa Valley Ontario Health Team (OVOHT), and Emergency Management Ontario.

Infectious Diseases

Hantavirus:

Hantaviruses are a family of viruses primarily carried by rodents and most often transmitted to humans through inhalation of aerosolized particles from rodent urine, droppings, or saliva. The Andes virus, endemic to parts of South America, is the only hantavirus known to spread person-to-person, and only through close, prolonged contact with a symptomatic individual.

RCDHU has been monitoring updates and receiving regular briefings from the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Ministry of Health regarding the Andes hantavirus cases and exposures linked to a cruise ship that first left from Argentina. As of May 12th, there are 11 known cases globally and no confirmed cases in Canada. A small number of returned passengers and close contacts are being actively monitored in several Ontario jurisdictions by their respective public health units. The Public Health Agency of Canada has assessed the overall risk to the general Canadian population as low, noting that onward spread within Canada is not expected.

At this time, RCDHU has not been made aware of anyone being impacted in Renfrew County and District; however, if the need arises, RCDHU is ready to respond. Strong relationships with local hospitals and paramedic services help support the health of communities across RCD.

Respiratory Illness Activity:

Respiratory outbreak rates in institutions have slowed to low-moderate for RCD. There were a total of 4 confirmed outbreaks occurring in April, all of which were declared in the first half of the month. Seasonal Coronavirus has been the primary pathogen identified in confirmed respiratory outbreaks, while Rhinovirus and Parainfluenza were identified in the remainder of outbreaks.

Overall, respiratory illness activity has also slowed steadily. Community positivity rates of COVID-19 have declined to low, Influenza rates remain low, and both are below the provincial average. RSV rates have seen a slight increase to a moderate status and are currently above the provincial average. Hospital bed occupancy rates remain stable at a moderate level. Respiratory related emergency visit rates remain unchanged, in the vicinity of 8-10% (low) since week 3 of 2026.

HEALTH PROTECTION

Lung Health in Renfrew County and District

As part of its ongoing review of population health indicators for Renfrew County and District, respiratory disease has emerged as a notable area of excess burden. The convergence of evidence across multiple data sources presents a consistent picture. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in RCD, occurring at a rate 30% above Ontario (79.4 vs. 61.2 per 100 000, age-standardized). Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a progressive and irreversible lung condition most commonly caused by long-term smoking, is 40% more common locally than across Ontario (9789 vs 7003 per 100 000), with new diagnoses 60% above the provincial rate.

While smoking rates in RCD have declined, historically higher rates have left a large pool of current and former smokers (approximately 53% of adults). This is compounded by elevated residential radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas and the second leading cause of lung cancer after smoking. Between 2009 and 2024, 192 local radon test results are available, with 29% showing results above the 200 Bq/m³ guideline, compared to the rural Central Canada figure of 20%. Radon and smoking multiply each other's risk, meaning that even comparable smoking rates translate into greater lung cancer risk in a higher-radon area.

Staff are developing a local radon testing and education program, identifying local radon policy intervention opportunities, and reviewing gaps in smoking cessation availability, lung cancer screening uptake, and opportunities for earlier COPD identification, including through the RCDHU unattached patients initiative (UPI) collaboration with the Ottawa Valley Ontario Health Team.

Healthy Babies, Healthy Children (HBHC) Program

The HBHC Home Visiting Program is a voluntary early-intervention program for families identified through screening and assessment as being at risk for compromised child development.

Funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) and delivered by Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) staff, the program supports families during pregnancy and from birth until a child's transition to school. Families may access services through self-referral or professional referral.

The program aims to optimize child growth and development and reduce health inequities. The interdisciplinary home visiting team includes public health nurses, a home visitor, and social workers. Each team member supports approximately 15–20 families, with visit frequency tailored to family needs.

RCDHU also maintains a partnership with Pembroke Regional Hospital to ensure continuity of care in the postpartum period. HBHC public health nurses meet with families prior to hospital discharge.

Program Activity (April 1st, 2025 – March 31st, 2026):

- Provided services to 733 families across Renfrew County and District
- Conducted 1442 home visits
- Supported 301 postpartum clients through hospital liaison visits
- Collaborated with community partners to screen 968 residents for HBHC eligibility

Renfrew County and District Drug Strategy

On April 23rd, a [media release](#) was issued to inform residents of an increasing trend in suspected drug toxicity deaths observed during the first quarter of 2026. Surveillance draws on multiple sources, including regional and provincial drug supply monitoring, community reports from people who use drugs, and information from partners in law enforcement, addiction treatment, and healthcare. Toxicology findings from the Office of the Chief Coroner of Ontario are also reviewed as they become available.

There were 10 suspected drug toxicity deaths in Q1 2026, compared to 12 deaths reported across all of 2025. The majority of recent deaths have occurred among males aged 40–60 years, consistent with broader provincial trends.

Harm Reduction and Community Safety Working Group meetings were held recently, with partners continuing implementation of priorities under the Renfrew County and District Drug Strategy (RCDDS).

Harm Reduction initiatives for Spring 2026 focus on the expansion of drug checking and mobile outreach services. RCDHU has added medetomidine drug test strips to available harm reduction supplies in response to the growing presence of this veterinary tranquilizer in the unregulated drug supply across Ontario. Planning is underway to further integrate Mesa Mobile Drug Testing with interdisciplinary outreach teams and to strategically expand these services in support of the Drug Toxicity Response Plan.

Community Safety partners reported a continued decline in social disorder-related concerns. The City of Pembroke's *Report a Concern* feature is being actively used to track and respond to community safety and well-being issues. Partners also received an update on utilization of services at the Mesa HART (Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment) Hub and Intake Centre. The completion of 229 social contracts at the Intake Centre was identified as a contributing factor to the observed reduction in social disorder complaints.

Outreach and Sexual Health

RCDHU's Outreach Team will complete 14 visits to locations across RCD in May and has recently started including community organizations providing services to seniors. At these locations, the Team is providing information on the Unattached Patients Initiative, cancer screening, and other services and programs that seniors may benefit from, as well as providing vaccinations that are publicly funded for seniors. These include vaccines for pneumococcal disease, shingles, influenza, COVID-19, RSV, and tetanus. As of May 8th, 45 seniors have received 64 vaccines through this program and clients have expressed a strong interest in repeat visits.

RCDHU sexual health nurses have increased accessibility to sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection (STBBI) testing in the community by offering STBBI testing for individuals not eligible for testing under the SPRITE study. Since the beginning of the year, 33 individuals have been tested for syphilis, HIV, hepatitis C, hepatitis B, chlamydia, and gonorrhea. Two infections have been identified and successfully treated by RCDHU sexual health nurses through this testing.

RCDHU continues to promote [GetaKit](#) and will launch a promotion campaign to increase awareness of the service. With 20 health units now participating, the study plans to extend past 2027 and may become a permanent service in Ontario.

CATCH My Breath

Another secondary school in Renfrew County and District participated in a research study evaluating the effectiveness of the *CATCH My Breath* vaping prevention curriculum in reducing vaping initiation among high school students, with ethics approval from Ontario Tech University (18093, February 12th, 2025) and the Renfrew County District School Board. Delivered by a trained Public Health staff member over two 60-minute sessions, the curriculum covered vape components, health risks and addiction, social influences, and refusal strategies. Participation will help assess the program's impact on preventing youth vaping and inform school-based prevention efforts. At Valour K-12 School, 38 students attended the first combined session and 21 attended the second, with higher engagement observed in the larger classroom setting.

Nutrition

You're the Chef:

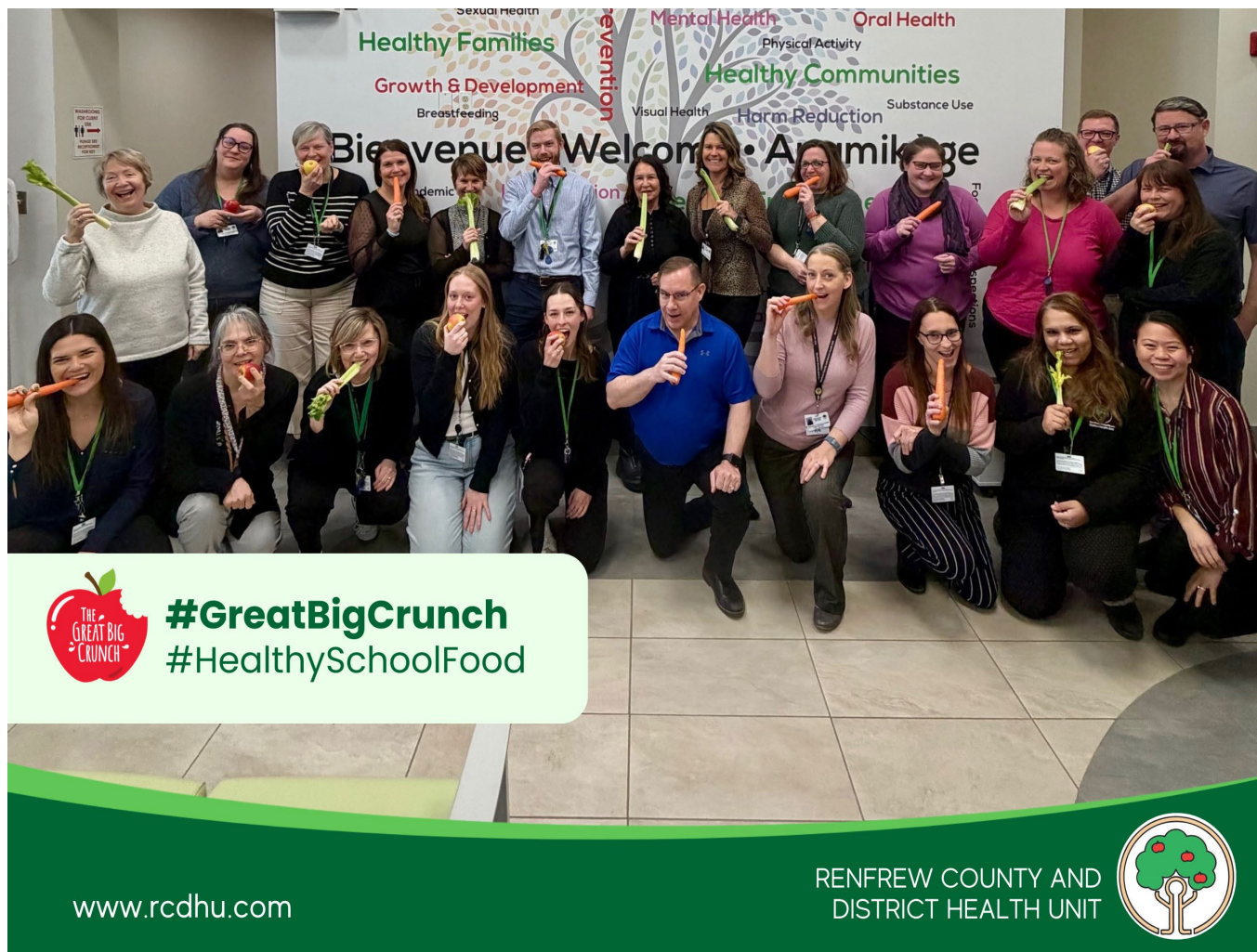
Implementation of the You're the Chef program continues to demonstrate strong momentum through ongoing collaboration with local education partners. This month, the Renfrew County and District Health Unit completed a centralized training session with eight participants, including five teachers and three Inspired Learning Coaches from the Renfrew County District School Board. This approach supports broader program reach and sustainability by building internal capacity within the school system.

Program delivery in schools also continues to expand. Since the last update, six more teachers completed the You're the Chef program with their respective classes, while three additional classes initiated the program this month. These activities reflect sustained interest and continued uptake of the program across the region. Overall, current engagement indicates that growth is ongoing, with increasing integration of food literacy programming in school settings and continued enthusiasm from educators.

Great Big Crunch:

[The Great Big Crunch](#) is a national initiative that brings together students, educators, and communities across Canada to collectively "crunch" into a fruit or vegetable in support of healthy school food. The initiative supports the work of the [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#) (CHSF), a broad network of non-profit organizations and partners that has played a key role in advocating for and advising on the development of [Canada's National School Food Program](#). The CHSF was instrumental in advancing this federal program and continues to work to ensure it becomes a permanent, universal, and high-quality program across the country.

Efforts to strengthen school food programs are grounded in evidence that access to nutritious food at school supports student health, well-being, and readiness to learn. Staff at the Renfrew County and District Health Unit continue to support the Great Big Crunch annually by participating alongside community partners, reflecting local commitment to advancing healthy school food environments and food literacy among children and youth.



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