



Medical Officer of Health Report to the Board

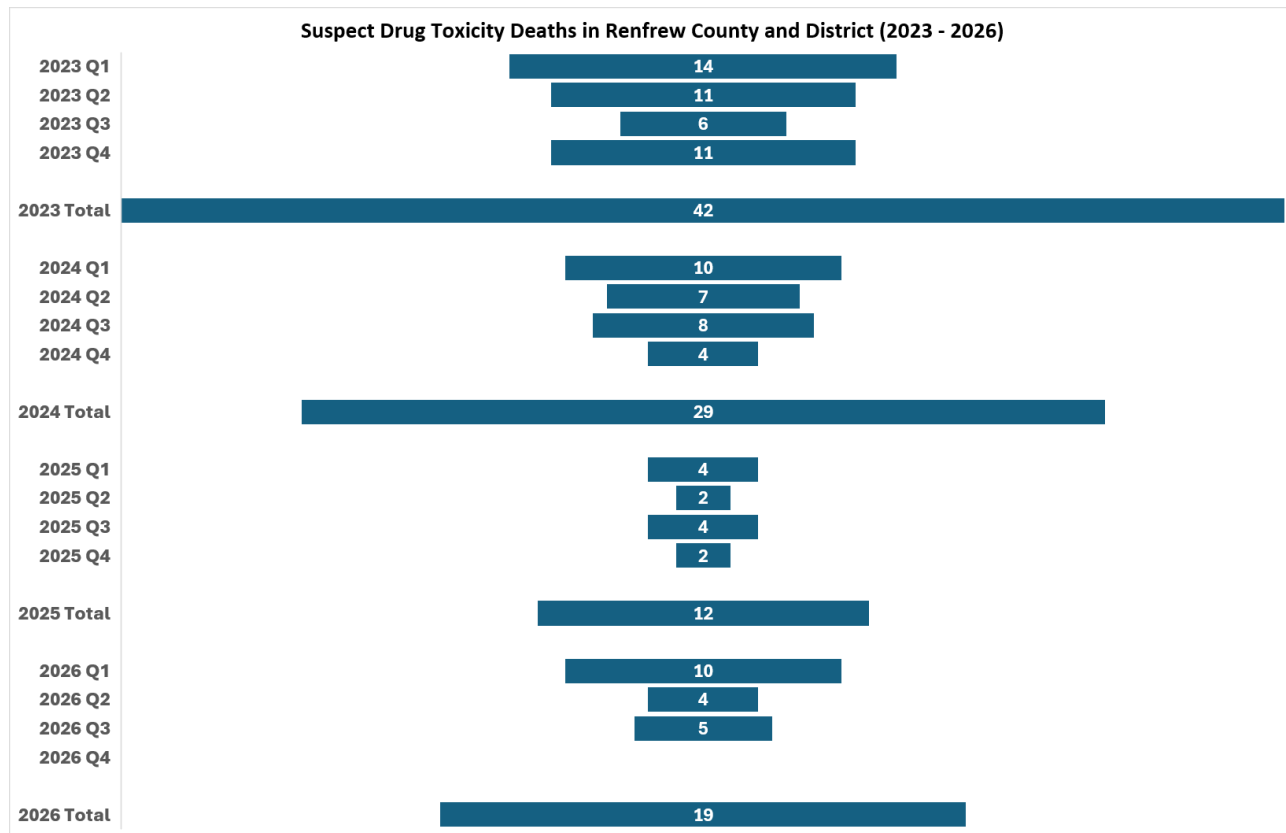
September 29th, 2026

HEALTH PROMOTION AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Renfrew County and District Drug Strategy (RCDDS)

RCDDS Steering Committee and Working Group partners remain committed to advancing the priorities of the strategy through collaboration and evidence-based interventions. Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) staff have contributed to this work in many ways over the summer through outreach, naloxone distribution, overdose response training, and the development of "don't use alone" and stigma awareness campaigns. Staff have also been evaluating partnership agreements to explore further opportunities for priorities related to drug testing, remote spotting applications, and data collection.

Since the previous report in June, six additional suspect drug toxicity deaths have been reported, bringing the total to 19 in 2026 to date.



Emergency department visits have decreased by 41% when compared to the same period in 2025, dropping from 41 to 24 as of the end of August.

Public Health Outreach and Sexual Health

RCDHU's Outreach Team continues to expand its services and presence across Renfrew County and District (RCD). Outreach visits have increased from 17 in the first quarter to 37 in the second quarter and 42 so far in the third quarter. The team continues to reach out to community agencies across RCD, adding three new sites this quarter.

Syphilis Point-of-Care Rapid Testing and Immediate Treatment Evaluation (SPRITE) study testing for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) continues to be offered at suitable Outreach Team events and at RCDHU's Pembroke office. Since its implementation in August 2024, RCDHU nurses have completed 279 tests for syphilis, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B, and hepatitis C for individuals at higher risk of infection, 31 of which were completed so far this quarter. Individuals who tested positive have been treated and/or referred to appropriate specialists.

Work from the SPRITE study was also published in two recent peer-reviewed articles, with multiple RCDHU team members listed as co-authors. Below are links to the two publications:

- [Evaluation of a Real-Time Knowledge Exchange Network Supporting Syphilis Rapid Testing and Immediate Treatment in Seven Public Health Units in Ontario, Canada](#)
- [Females at the intersection: Housing instability, drug use, and syphilis risk among street-involved populations in Ontario, Canada](#)

Sexual Health:

In response to community needs, the Sexual Health program is working to increase access to sexual health services in RCD, including making STBBI testing available for all residents. PHNs have completed 32 STBBI testing interactions so far this quarter, mostly for clients who do not have a primary care provider or whose primary care provider is unavailable.

RCDHU PHNs are now available for a walk-in Sexual Health Clinic at the RCDHU Pembroke office every Wednesday from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. Additional clinics are always available by appointment. Along with STBBI testing, other services offered include lower-cost birth control, pregnancy testing, and sexual health education and counselling. Individuals who require additional sexual health care services are referred to a nurse practitioner or physician in their area. Three new partnerships have been developed with nurse practitioners and physicians in communities across RCD to connect these individuals to appropriate care.

Nutrition - Community Food Champions

RCDHU is developing a new food literacy program, Community Food Champions, in partnership with the Ottawa Valley Ontario Health Team (OVOHT), supporting older adults experiencing food insecurity. The program is intended to reduce stigma and create a welcoming space for older adults with diverse food experiences, needs, and circumstances. The program builds local capacity through a train-the-trainer model, empowering community leads to deliver practical, hands-on sessions within their own settings and support sustainable delivery. Recipes centre on food bank and pantry staples and are designed around small portions, minimal ingredients, and basic cooking equipment to reflect the financial realities of older adults experiencing poverty and food insecurity. Recipes also emphasize protein, fibre, and other considerations for healthy aging, along with food safety and practical food skills. Dignity, choice, and participant autonomy are central to the program, and it is important to recognize that food skills alone do not address the inadequate income underlying household food insecurity. RCDHU is working collaboratively with community partners to develop a practical, evidence-informed program that reflects local needs and supports meaningful community uptake.

Healthy Families

From Pilot to Practice - Expanding Well-Baby Assessment Skills Across RCDHU Programs:

In August 2026, six PHNs participated in a half-day well-baby head-to-toe assessment training session facilitated by a nurse practitioner at the Pembroke Family Medicine Teaching Unit (PFMTU). While the training supports the ongoing primary care pilot, it was expanded to build broader clinical assessment capacity across RCDHU. The training focused on comprehensive infant assessments, distinguishing normal findings from potential concerns, and early identification of health and developmental needs. RCDHU aims to apply these skills beyond the pilot, where appropriate, to improve access to early assessment and intervention for families, particularly those with limited or no access to primary care.

Advancing Integrated Care - Launch of the Ocean eReferral Platform:

On September 15th, 2026, RCDHU launched the Ocean eReferral platform, initially supporting the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) and Healthy Growth and Development (HGD) programs. Future expansion is planned for Harm Reduction, Sexual Health, Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPD), and other programs. The platform allows us to receive electronic referrals from health care partners using the Ocean network, including primary care providers, the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre (RC-VTAC), and ConnectWell. This means that partners will have more convenient access to RCDHU referrals, which will be embedded in their electronic medical records. It is intended to improve referral coordination and service navigation across RCD.

Infectious Diseases

Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis Initiative:

On May 15th, 2026, RCDHU implemented a rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (RPEP) program to support its clients and primary/urgent care partners.

Historically, health care providers in hospital emergency departments have been responsible for administering the full RPEP regimen. For previously unimmunized patients, this includes immunoglobulin and the day 0 vaccine dose, followed by vaccine doses on days 3, 7, and 14, with an additional dose on day 28 for immunocompromised patients.

Since mid-May, the Infectious Diseases team, Healthy Environments team, and emergency departments have collaborated on a new care pathway that offers follow-up vaccine doses at RCDHU as part of regular case management. This reduces demand on emergency department health care providers and supports the patient experience through one-on-one follow-up.

Fifty individuals received RPEP vaccine doses at RCDHU through visits at the Pembroke office, the Renfrew Service Hub, or home visits where barriers to accessibility existed. Five individuals for whom RPEP was indicated opted to complete their vaccine series at the hospital.

Approximately 130 RPEP vaccine doses were administered. Providing these doses at RCDHU offers an alternative to emergency department visits, where wait and treatment times vary depending on other urgent care needs.

Respiratory Illness Activity:

Respiratory outbreak activity in institutions has remained low, with only five respiratory outbreaks confirmed since mid-May. Rhinovirus/enterovirus was identified as the causative pathogen in four of these outbreaks.

According to [RCDHU's Respiratory Illness Data Summary](#) for September 6th to 12th, 2026, average daily hospital bed occupancy due to COVID-19, influenza, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) was zero, and respiratory-related concerns accounted for a low 4.7% of emergency

department visits by RCD residents. Overall respiratory illness activity remained low. Reported test positivity for influenza, RSV, and COVID-19 was 0%.

Provincially, influenza A test positivity increased from 0.3% to 1.7% between the weeks ending August 8th and September 12th, 2026, alongside rising influenza-positive hospital admissions, which is higher than the influenza activity typically seen at this time of year. These trends suggest a possible early start to the influenza season, supporting preparedness and timely vaccination when available and eligible next month.

HEALTH PROTECTION, DENTAL HEALTH, AND SCHOOL HEALTH

Immunization

Immunization Access and School-Year Results:

As announced in a [June 9th, 2026 media release](#), RCDHU introduced online booking for routine immunization clinic dates beginning July 1st, 2026, with telephone booking assistance remaining available. This provides an additional way to access services, including for residents without a primary care provider. Following the 2025–2026 school-year immunization surveillance and catch-up efforts, more than 94% of students met Immunization of School Pupils Act requirements, and measles immunization coverage among students was approximately 95%.

Cold Chain Inspections:

RCDHU's vaccine inventory team is conducting annual cold chain inspections at facilities in RCD that store publicly funded vaccines. Between June and September 2026, 112 of 114 vaccine fridges were inspected. The remaining two inspections are scheduled for completion. These inspections support compliance with provincial vaccine storage and handling guidelines and maintain vaccine integrity.

Grade 7 School-Based Immunization Program:

During the summer, RCDHU staff offered catch-up clinics for Grade 7 students. Through these efforts, a combined total of 160 doses of hepatitis B, meningococcal, and human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines were administered to eligible students.

The first round of Grade 7 school immunization clinics for the 2026–2027 school year is underway. Approximately 1100 students are eligible, with 43 school-based clinics planned for the fall and a second round scheduled for spring 2027. As of September 16th, 2026, 10 school clinics have been completed.

Respiratory Illness Season Immunization Campaign:

RCDHU is preparing for the 2026–2027 respiratory season immunization campaign. The phased rollout of influenza and COVID-19 vaccines will begin with high-risk and priority populations in October, followed by the general population aged six months and older in November.

RCDHU will offer mobile clinics at retirement homes and mass community clinics throughout RCD. Based on provincial eligibility, vaccines will be available for influenza, COVID-19, RSV, and pneumococcal disease. RCDHU will also continue to work with community partners to provide accessible and convenient immunization options across RCD.

Healthy Environments

Rabies Prevention and Control Program:

RCDHU public health inspectors continue to investigate potential human exposures to rabies. Consistent with trends observed in 2025, bat-related exposures increased during July and August but remained below 2025 levels. These incidents increased the need for RPEP, which includes vaccine and, where indicated, immunoglobulin. During July and August, 44 individuals

received RPEP, a 31% decrease from the 64 individuals who received it during the same period in 2025.

To date in 2026, RCDHU has completed 58 investigations involving bat-related exposures and submitted seven bats for rabies testing; all results were negative.

Safe Water Program:

RCDHU's public beach sampling program is conducted during the summer months, when recreational water use is at its highest. In 2026, sampling took place from June 15th through the final week of August. In July, Douglas Beach was posted as unsafe for swimming for seven days, and Barry's Bay Beach was posted for eight days, due to elevated bacterial levels. No public beaches were posted as a result of blue-green algae blooms.

Cobden Drinking Water - Elevated Manganese:

RCDHU supported the Township of Whitewater Region and the Ontario Clean Water Agency in responding to elevated manganese levels in Cobden's municipal drinking water. This included reviewing water-quality results, providing health-risk advice, supporting public communications, and answering questions at the [September 2nd Council meeting](#). A joint advisory issued on August 21st recommended an alternative drinking water source for infants 12 months of age and younger. Following sustained results below Health Canada's 0.12 mg/L guideline, the [advisory was lifted](#) on September 10th in consultation with RCDHU. RCDHU continues to review monitoring results with municipal and operator partners.

Vector-Borne Disease Control Program:

RCDHU completed its 10-week mosquito testing program again this summer. A total of 118 mosquito pools from 13 trapping locations across RCD were tested for West Nile virus (WNV) and eastern equine encephalitis virus. Two pools tested positive for WNV: one in Arnprior (July 22nd) and one in Deep River (August 19th). A [media release](#) and additional social media posts were issued to notify the public and provide information on reducing the risk of mosquito bites and WNV exposure.

Heat and Wildfire Smoke Response:

During the summer, RCDHU issued public advisories in response to extreme heat and wildfire-related poor air quality, including media releases on the [July 1st heat warning](#) and [July 14th air-quality alert](#). Communications emphasized practical protective measures, symptom recognition, and precautions for people at greater risk. Residents were also directed to local cooling centres, air-conditioned public spaces, and resources for monitoring conditions.

RCDHU also updated its [Air Quality and Wildfire Smoke webpage](#) with practical health guidance and access to [local air-quality readings](#). Working with community partners, RCDHU expanded fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) monitoring through additional sensors hosted in Arnprior and Barry's Bay. These supplement existing monitoring in Renfrew, Pembroke, Petawawa, and Smoke Lake in Algonquin Provincial Park, helping residents and organizations assess local conditions and reduce smoke exposure.

Dental Health

Summer Community Dental Clinics at Local Libraries:

This summer, RCDHU delivered its third year of community dental clinics at local libraries. Library staff took a more active role in promoting the clinics, and attendance increased by 14% as communities became more familiar with the program.

2026 Highlights

- 9 community library clinics
- 135 residents reached
- 15 clients per clinic on average
- 69 children (ages 3–18) served
- 11 fluoride treatments provided

Delivered in partnership with Service Canada and RCDHU's HGD team, the clinics provided access to multiple services in one location. Eligible residents received support enrolling in Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO), the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP), and the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), as well as information on oral health, dental coverage, school screenings, and other available services.

Feedback from residents and library partners was positive. This interest demonstrates the value of bringing services directly into community settings and the demand for accessible oral health supports.

Submitted by:

Dr. Jason Morgenstern

Medical Officer of Health

Renfrew County and District Health Unit