

## **Board of Health Meeting April 21, 2022**

### **Summary**

#### **SUBSTANCE USE AND OVERDOSE CRISIS**

A presentation on the current illicit drug use in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark, highlighted the increase in reports of drug overdoses from 110 overdoses in 2019 to 165 in 2020 and 217 in 2021. Deaths also increased from 17 in 2019 to 31 in 2020, and as of Oct. 2021, there have been 26 deaths due to illicit drugs. The Board discussed the need for a community wide approach, and for municipalities to identify how they can contribute to:

- Development of youth to encourage healthy choices e.g. recreational opportunities for youth, connecting with other youth and adults in the community.
- Specific harm reduction programs in their communities e.g. naloxone distribution, needle pick-up in public settings, substance checking, overdose early warning system, supervised injection drug use site, peer-led support.
- Community partnerships e.g. Municipal Drug Strategies, Lanark Planet Youth.

#### **COVID-19 UPDATE**

- The number of new infections with a positive PCR test continues to be high since the start of the increase in mid-March. The wastewater data also suggests there is more virus circulating in the community. This is likely due, in part, to the emergence of the BA.2 Omicron variant which is more transmissible than BA 1.1, the previous dominant circulating strain.
- The Medical Officers of Health and Chiefs of Staff of all Hospitals in Ontario East (from Hastings Prince Edward on) published a media release about the increase in transmission within their communities and strongly recommend:
  - Keeping up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccine, including booster doses
  - Using a well fitted, three layer mask in indoor public spaces
  - Staying home when sick, even if symptoms are mild
  - Keeping social gatherings small, avoiding crowded spaces
  - Practising respiratory etiquette (like coughing into your elbow) and washing your hands frequently.
- Since January 1, 2022, we have had 33 deaths where COVID-19 either caused the death or contributed to it. Almost all of the deaths are occurring among the 60 plus age group, in individuals that have not received COVID-19 vaccine and/or have serious underlying health problems that contribute to serious infection causing death. Most people who died were living in the community rather than in congregate settings. This is very different than the initial wave in spring 2020.

Congregate care homes with seniors now have high levels of vaccine coverage and are following precautions.

- The new provincial program to increase access to the antiviral medication Paxlovid for eligible people at higher risk of serious COVID infection will hopefully prevent deaths due to COVID-19 infection. Given early in the infection, within five days of symptoms onset, Paxlovid prevents the virus from replicating in the cell so infection is less severe. The Health Unit is providing information to the public about eligibility and what is needed to be assessed for the medication on its website and through social and regular media.

### **COVID-19 VACCINE**

- Third dose boosters have been received by 71% of the 12 plus LGL population. A recent research study suggests that having three doses of the vaccine does significantly decrease the amount of virus shed by a person with COVID-19 compared to two doses of vaccine up to six months after the last dose. This likely means less transmission and it also provides added protection against serious infection.
- There has been a strong community response, in the past two weeks, for people age 60 plus to receive a fourth booster dose. Fourth booster doses are recommended at five months, but can be given as soon as three months after the third dose. Throughout LGL, 10.3% of the 60 plus age group, 20.9% of the 80 plus age group, 10.5% of residents in their 70s, and 6.6% of people in their 60's have already received the fourth dose from one of our clinics, a pharmacy, or primary care. This is the age group with the highest level of hospitalization and death after COVID infection, and will provide an added boost in immunity to respond to the new Omicron BA.2 variant that is currently circulating.