

Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit COVID-19 Community Response Update

COVID-19 causes a wide range of mild, moderate and severe symptoms. The experience of older people in our long-term care and retirement homes emphasizes that older people, and those with underlying health problems, are more likely to have severe disease with a significant risk of death. People with mild to moderate symptoms can recover at home for 14 days.

Looking at the last three weeks in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark, there have been some days when we have had no people newly diagnosed with COVID-19, some days when one person has been diagnosed, and occasionally two people have been diagnosed. This low number of people infected means that many people are practicing physical distancing and staying home when sick to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. It also reminds us that the virus is still circulating in the community, and in other communities that people who live in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark may visit, so it is important that each person acts to protect themselves and others.

In Leeds, Grenville and Lanark, some long-term care homes and retirement homes are experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks. The Public Health Unit works with each long-term care and retirement home to meet the provincial requirements for infection prevention and control during a COVID-19 outbreak. Much has been learned over the last two months about the virus in a Home setting which has changed how we respond. Many residents are asymptomatic unlike other respiratory infections like influenza, and the COVID-19 virus is very contagious and spreads easily in a Home setting. The provincial testing program of residents and staff in long-term care homes will be completed on Friday and the results will be discussed with each Home.

The Leeds Grenville Community Paramedic Program has been a valuable partner to help with testing for people at home and in long-term care and retirement homes. Recently a provincial directive has required that local hospitals, and the Champlain and South East Local Health Integration Networks (Ontario Health), provide support to the Homes in outbreak, as needed. The hospitals are also now developing plans to reopen some surgery and clinics given the low level of cases in our region.

Public Health Inspectors have been working with essential businesses open to the public to set up their environment to support preventive measures. A resource has been prepared to support more businesses and services when they will be able to open safely, including in store shopping.

Municipalities have closed their offices, recreation facilities, and parks, and are actively involved with by-law officers, police, and public health inspectors working together to reinforce provincial restrictions.

The opening, with safeguards for parks for walking, community gardens, and farmers' markets signifies a change in the environment that will hopefully continue. Public Health has been working with organizers of both community gardens and farmers' markets to develop changes to keep people safe.

During this next phase, it is critical that all the preventive measures put in place continue including physical distancing, and staying home when sick and being tested. There is a risk that more people could become infected when restrictions are lifted. The Health Unit will continue to play an important role to provide information to the public, and the follow-up of cases and contacts. We will also continue to work with municipalities on the reopening of areas in a safe way.

Submitted by: Dr. Paula Stewart, Medical Officer of Health/CEO May 21, 2020