

Lindsay covid testing centre continues to evolve through pandemic

Catherine Whitnall

Every day is different for those working at the local COVID-19 test centre, but the goal is always the same.

Keep the community safe.

Assessment and testing has changed since the pandemic was first made official on March 13 and the Ross Memorial Hospital set up a site in its ambulance bay.

“On March 15, we received notification that there were some positive COVID-19 cases in the City of Kawartha Lakes. We felt it was important to have a setting where we could safely conduct assessments, swabbing and testing,” said director of surgery and obstetrics and COVID-19 team member, Tab Carroll. “We opened up at 10 a.m. on March 16 and there were already people waiting.”

Although only 38 tests were actually done during the centre’s first three days, those arriving to be assessed - many of whom had recently travelled - were 10 times that number. Congestion, safety and the privacy of other patients was becoming a concern.

Then Lindsay Agricultural Society general manager Harry Stoddart reached out to offer space at the fairgrounds.

“We had such a solid team out there and it wasn’t just nurses,” said Carroll. “We had staff from so many other departments working and they took their roles seriously.”

So seriously that, despite conducting 8,114 tests between March 15 and July 9 - and interacting with thousands more people - not a single team member has so far tested positive for the virus.

Close to 2,000 people were tested at both the first and second locations leading up to May 14 when testing guidelines expanded to include anyone with one or more symptoms or concerns over exposure. Traffic increased significantly with 5,211 people tested at the fairgrounds site in the weeks that followed. On July 6, the centre returned to the hospital, this time at the Angeline Street entrance with access off Kent Street.

“The heat wave was brutal and there was still a lot of summer left,” said Lisa Hickey, surgical manager and COVID-19 team member. “But more importantly, [moving back] offered greater access to extra staffing and supplies.”

Apparently, the public saw it as a bonus too.

“Typically, we were seeing 200 people at the LEX. Our first day back at the Ross we had 313 people come,” said Carroll.

In just three days, 984 tests were completed.

Granted, testing numbers don't take into account the number of people who were assessed and tested at home by the mobile team - a tremendously successful partnership between Kawartha Lakes Paramedic Services and the hospital - or those tested in retirement, nursing, assisting living and group homes. Both women cite the collaboration between health and community groups has made a significant difference in how the City of Kawartha Lakes has weathered the COVID-19 storm.

“Every new curve ball this thing has thrown our way, people have had to step up and respond on the fly,” said Carroll. “Every week we seem to find a new thing we’ve had to overcome.”

Hickey agrees that the biggest challenge of the pandemic has been its unpredictability.

“We’ve all been trying to adapt to all these changes that, in the beginning, were coming at us daily. It’s just amazing how many people’s jobs have changed as a result of this,” said Hickey who not only continues her management duties, but also processes about 1,000 swabs a week.

The women encourage anyone who is concerned about potentially having the virus or having come in contact with someone who has, to stop by the testing centre between 9:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., Monday to Friday, weather permitting. Appointments are not necessary and testing is a ‘drive-thru’ model. People are asked to bring their health card and a government-issued ID and remain in their vehicle at all times. Testing is limited to those aged 12 and older; those younger should go to the emergency department.

Test results should be available online within 72 hours via [Ontario.ca/coronavirus](https://ontario.ca/coronavirus). If not, please call [705-328-6217](tel:705-328-6217).



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