

Half of new COVID-19 cases in Kawartha Lakes and Northumberland due to outbreaks at long-term care homes

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January 28, 2021

Medical officer of health says all area long-term care residents to be vaccinated by February 5

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Published



Caressant Care McLaughlin Road is a 96-bed long-term care home in Lindsay. (Photo: Google Maps)

COVID-19 cases in the Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge (HKPR) District Health Unit remain in an upswing, primarily due to worsening outbreaks in area long-term care homes.

“Because of the restrictions that are in place, we are seeing quieter days sometimes, but we still have had over 150 cases in the last two weeks,” said Dr. Ian Gemmill, acting medical officer of health, during a virtual media briefing on Wednesday (January 27).

“About half of those new cases are in outbreaks,” Dr. Gemmill said.

There are currently six institutional outbreaks in the health unit’s region, the most serious of which is at Caressant Care McLaughlin Road long-term care home in Lindsay. The outbreak was declared on January 9. As of January 27, there are 22 confirmed cases in residents and 19 cases in staff, as well as three resident deaths.

So far in 2020, there have been 13 COVID-related deaths in the health unit’s region, with five deaths in Northumberland County and eight in the City of Kawartha Lakes. At least half of those deaths have been of residents in area long-term care homes.

“(The outbreak at Caressant Care McLaughlin Road) is under control, and we are working with the people providing care there to make sure that it stays that way,” Dr. Gemmill said. “But it has had some spillover with other parts of the community. I want to assure people that what’s happening in Lindsay is not out of the ordinary. What’s happening there is something that could happen anywhere in Ontario.”

Worsening outbreaks among the most vulnerable populations living in long-term care homes reveal the urgency for vaccinations, according to Dr. Gemmill.

“Outbreaks can be stopped by vaccines,” he said.

The health unit received 700 doses of the Moderna mRNA vaccine on Monday (January 25) and is currently distributing it to residents of Pinecrest Nursing Home in Bobcaygeon, Hope Street Terrace in Port Hope, and Maplewood Long-Term Care Home in Brighton.

“We’ve started in long-term care homes because these are the most vulnerable people,” explained Dr. Gemmill. “That’s also what the province of Ontario has directed us to do. We’ve got to stop these outbreaks — to keep these elderly people, these vulnerable people, protected.”

About 1,600 long-term care residents are living in the health unit’s area. The current supply of 700 doses will vaccinate under half of these residents.

The health unit expects to receive a few hundred more doses of the Moderna vaccine next week. Dr. Gemmill said that, based on what the provincial government has told him, all area long-term care residents will be inoculated by February 5th.

Once long-term care residents have been vaccinated, the health unit will begin to inoculate long-term care staff, essential caregivers, and healthcare workers. Although there are currently vaccine supply issues, Dr. Gemmill said that, eventually, everyone who wants it will have access to the vaccine.

“A large portion of the population will need to receive the vaccine for community-wide protection,” he said. “That is how we get back to normal.”

Dr. Gemmill also addressed potential concerns about the safety of the vaccine, given the speed of its development.

“The clinical trials have been conducted on tens of thousands of people,” he said. “Millions, since its licensing, have already received it. We are not hearing that there are safety problems with this vaccine.”

“(Vaccine development) was fast, but they were able to piggy-back on a technology that had been developed for other purposes, and it worked.”

The health unit has already submitted its completed COVID-19 vaccination program to the provincial health ministry. The program details their plans for vaccine distribution over the next few months.

In the meantime, Dr. Gemmill continues to urge people to respect the stay-at-home orders issued by the provincial government, to keep people uninfected until they are vaccinated.

“The virus is still present everywhere, and it can have significant complications like hospitalization,” he said. “Never forget that we are only two or three degrees of separation away from someone vulnerable.”

Social gatherings banned by the stay-at-home order do not have to be organized or large gatherings, Dr. Gemmill pointed out.

“Gatherings can be as simple as a pickup game of some sport. The province of Ontario is asking you to stay home.”

He encouraged anyone who wants to socialize to do it virtually.

“Please don’t get together for coffee or beer unless it’s by Zoom,” Dr. Gemmill said. “Even birthday parties should be done remotely now. It’s up to us all to take action so that others do not become ill.”

As of January 27, there are 89 active cases of COVID-19 in the health unit’s region, including 65 in Kawartha Lakes, 19 in Northumberland, and 5 in Haliburton.

Comments
