

“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.”