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
LOCAL : NEWS

Lindsay superjail in outbreak as 30 COVID cases reported

Central East Correctional Centre has also taken COVID-positive inmates from other institutions in an attempt to help slow the spread

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By **Barbara-ann Maceachern**

Tue., Jan. 11, 2022 |  4 min. read

A COVID-19 outbreak has been declared once again at Central East Correctional Centre, with 30 active inmate cases being reported as of Jan. 6.

While the total number of inmates cases is reported through a [provincial database](#), those identified in staff at the jail are not.

“The ministry does not publicly discuss staff absences for security reasons. The ministry confirms that the facility has adequate staffing levels to securely supervise the current inmate population,” said Ministry of Solicitor General media relations spokesperson Andrew Morrison.

According to one inmate at CECC, who recently reached out to This Week through a family member, staff shortages have led to prolonged periods of lockdowns, which he said started Dec. 14 in his pod and extended until Jan. 8. He wrote to say he and 24 other inmates would be starting a hunger strike the following day in protest of the treatment.

He claims, in a letter that could not be corroborated by This Week, that inmates in his pod were told Dec. 24 that a staff member on their unit had tested positive so the area lockdown continued while inmates were put on droplet precautions and tested for COVID-19. According to the inmate at the time of writing, it had been 15 days since his test and he had not yet received the results.

“All inmates at the Central East Correctional Centre accepted their institutional meals yesterday and today,” Morrison wrote to This Week Jan. 10, when asked about the alleged hunger strike, adding that, for the safety and security of staff and inmates alike, lockdowns are sometimes necessary.

“Lockdowns can result from a security incident, searches, maintenance or a number of other reasons. Where possible, partial lockdowns are always preferred to continue visitations, showers and inmate programs.”

CECC experienced another outbreak, with more than 150 inmate cases and at least 11 staff cases, as disclosed by the local health unit, in May of 2021. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been 242 cumulative cases reported at CECC as well as 34 inmates who have been released while infected with COVID-19 at the end of their sentence.

The Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit officially declared the most recent outbreak at CECC Jan. 4; however, according to the online provincial database, 23 positive cases of COVID-19 were identified in the jail as early as Dec. 19.

“This was when COVID-19 transmission was first detected in the facility,” explained Bill Eekhof, communications officer with the health unit.

“We understand the earlier case counts may relate to the transfer of inmates to the CCEC from other correctional facilities that were experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks.”

Although Morrison says the ministry does not disclose the details of inmate transfers for security reasons, he did confirm that

Brockville inmates were moved.

“Out of an abundance of caution, the ministry proactively transferred inmates from the Brockville Jail to other provincial correctional facilities, where they were placed on droplet and contact precautions and isolated from the rest of the inmate population,” he told This Week.

The latest reported cases of COVID-19 at the Brockville Institution were two cases Dec. 20.

“The transfer of inmates from the Brockville Jail was to help reduce potential further spread of the virus among inmates and staff at the facility, while the facility underwent a deep and thorough cleaning.”

OPSEU Local 368 union president Dave Sirrs told This Week that he is not surprised inmates with COVID-19 would be transferred to CECC. As the largest provincial facility in the region, Sirrs says absorbing cases in a place with more space to handle the containment makes sense.

However, when it comes to the overall number of COVID cases within the walls of the facility, Sirrs says he is in the dark.

“I think the numbers are certainly more than what is let on,” he adds.

“Unfortunately I don’t get that information.”

What is clear to the union president, however, is the pressure the pandemic has put on the correctional facility employees he represents.

“There is enormous pressure on the ability to function correctly and safely,” he says, noting that everyone working within the institution is professional and doing the best they can with the resources they have.

Sirrs also acknowledges the negative impact the pandemic has had for inmates at the facility.

“It becomes an issue for staff safety because the longer certain conditions last, the more it becomes a concern.”

Morrison adds that reducing the spread and keeping inmates and staff safe is the ministry’s top priority. He adds that the ministry has its own supply of COVID-19 vaccines that are made available to eligible inmates on an ongoing basis and that ministry staff continues with enhanced safety practices implemented since the beginning of the pandemic, including screening and quarantine for new inmates, use of appropriate PPE, temperature checks and testing where necessary.

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