

Health Unit reports first death from COVID-19 in region



March 31, 2020

By Nate Smelle

In the last week the global death-toll from the COVID-19 pandemic has more than doubled, rising from 15,328 to 41,261.

Worldwide, there are now 838,061 confirmed cases, which is also more than double the total last week at this time.

Canada's numbers have also continued to climb higher, now registering 8,180 confirmed cases and 95 deaths. In Ontario as of Tuesday afternoon 32 have died from COVID-19, and there were 1,966 confirmed cases.

On Tuesday Hastings Prince Edward Public Health Unit announced that a eighth person had tested positive with COVID-19 within the region.

Late Tuesday afternoon HPEPH announced that one of the cases in the region had resulted in the death of the affected individual.

The health unit also announced that this was the first instance of a lab-confirmed COVID-19 case in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties acquired through community spread, as opposed to international travel or close contact with a confirmed case.

Offering his ?sincere condolences to the family and friends who have been impacted by this loss of life,? HPE public health unit's medical officer of health Dr. Piotr Oglaza stated ?This reinforces the reality of COVID-19 in our community and I urge individuals to do everything they can to prevent its spread, recognizing that many are at higher risk from the virus. Stay home, avoid contact with vulnerable individuals, practice physical distancing, and wash your hands frequently.?

Through the health unit, assessment is available to anyone who believes they have been exposed to COVID-19, and testing is available to those who qualify. HPEPH also indicated that to date, hundreds of tests have been collected from residents of Hastings and Prince Edward counties and sent to the Public Health Ontario Laboratory. At the moment, public health is prioritizing testing to ensure those who need the tests most receive appropriate care.

In addition, the health unit also acknowledged that both lab-confirmed and probable cases of COVID-19 are receiving the same direction to: self-isolate for a minimum of 14 days, including from others living in the same space; - monitor symptoms and keep HPEPH apprised of any changes in health or symptoms; and, and wear a mask if the individual must leave home to seek medical attention. In an effort to have an open, transparent conversation about the local impact of COVID-19.

Oglaza recently addressed the current situation with the pandemic in the region on Facebook Live. During his address, Oglaza pointed out how although earlier in March it was only recommended by the federal government that international travellers self-isolate for 14 days upon returning to Canada, he said that officially changed on March 25 when the government implemented the Quarantine Act. Under the Quarantine Act, he said it is now mandatory for all travellers who return to Canada for 14 days. Furthermore, if an individual is exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 such as a fever, cough, or shortness of breath, Oglaza said it is now also mandatory for them to immediately contact public health or their local health care provider.

He explained ?This is in order to protect our most vulnerable citizens. So, what it means in terms of the Quarantine Act ? this is a

legal order under that legislation, and it carries very strict instructions to what that quarantine, self-isolation means; and it limits of the mobility of the individual who is ordered to quarantine. Going back to the purpose behind this change is that each of us must make the responsible decision to follow the advice of the health authorities. And this is in everyone's best interest to do everything we can to stop the spread of COVID-19.?

Whether there is a confirmed case in one's community or 100-kilometres away, Oglaza said it is still absolutely essential for everyone in Ontario and across Canada to practice physical distancing to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. He said the best strategy to avoid community spread is to ?follow physical distancing recommendations, stay home as much as possible. If you are going out in public then practice that distancing, maintaining two-metres space from others.?

Oglaza added that it is also very important for people to avoid touching their face, and wash their hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer. Acknowledging that a significant number of communities in both Hastings and Prince Edward counties are considered cottage country, he said many people from larger cities might be choosing to come to their cottage to attain more distance from others. Oglaza said it is important for anyone thinking of going up to their cottage to self-isolate to maintain the same physical distancing limits. In addition, because supplies at the local grocery stores and pharmacies in cottage communities do not tend to have as much stock, he advises people planning to spend time at their cottage to bring their supplies with them from the city.

For more information, as well as regular updates on how COVID-19 is affecting people in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties, visit: www.hpepublichealth.ca.

Individuals who still have questions can call the COVID-19 information line at 613-966-5500, Monday to Friday between 8:30 am and 8:30 p.m.; and on weekends from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The public is also advised to visit: Ontario's website to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.