COVID-19 outbreak in Hastings Highlands

By Kristena Schutt-Moore

The Hastings Prince Edward Public Health Unit is asking everyone in the Hastings Highlands area who has even mild symptoms of COVID-19 to get tested. On Monday, May 10 it was announced that there was an outbreak of 11 cases of the virus in the township.

The 11 cases of COVID-19 that have been identified are connected to several households that interacted with each other.?Quick and efficient contact tracing is essential to slow the spread of the COVID-19 in the community and it is imperative that individuals are truthful about their activities when speaking to public health staff.? says Dr. Piotr Og?aza, the medical officer of health and CEO at Hastings Prince Edward Public Health, explained in response to questions sent after the announcement. ?The public can be reassured that HPEPH is working diligently to identify and notify close contacts. Those who have tested positive, are symptomatic, or have been identified as high-risk contacts by HPEPH are reminded that self-isolating as directed by public health is a legal requirement. Individuals with any symptoms, even very mild ones such as a sore throat or runny nose, should isolate themselves from others and only leave isolation to seek testing. With the declaration of this community outbreak, HPEPH's advice about COVID-19 remains the same: limit interactions to only those who are part of your household, maintain two metres physical distance from others and wear a face covering when you must go out (ie.for medical appointments, groceries) and do not socialize with anyone outside your immediate household.?The HPEPH, does not typically identify individuals or locations of COVID-19 cases to protect individuals' privacy. However, when asked if the health unit would identify how the virus was spread, for example, is this locally spread, family spread or people coming from red-zones, no answer was given.

In response to the outbreak the HPEPH set up a testing site at 6 ANAF Road, also known as the Loggers' Field in Maynooth, on Tuesday, May 11 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.. Those who wished to get tested would drive down ANAF road to the Loggers' Field where Hastings Prince Edward paramedics and members of the health unit would perform the nasal swab test as people sat in their vehicles. This kept people physically distanced and allowed for tests to be done efficiently and quickly.

They were prepared with enough equipment to perform roughly 500 tests. However they were only expecting roughly 50 to 150 people to attend. Those who attended for testing were asked to reference investigation number 2238-2021-41725.Before each test was given patients were pre-screened with the usual screening questions, and papers to fill out. Those who attended should have had their results back within 24 hours to a few days. The results of each test is private as health card information and postal code is required, but is available to see on the website www.covid19results.ehealthontario.ca:4443. Those that are unable to go online can follow up with their family doctor or primary care provider for results.

If a test was positive the individual would also receive a call from the Hastings Prince Edward Public Health. During the call they

would be told to self isolate for at least 14 days, and given instructions on how to accomplish that for their specific situation, for example, if they live alone or with family. They would also be asked for information to help determine who they were in contact with while they might have been contagious and the HPEPH would try to find where the patient came in contact with the virus. Those who knew that they came in contact with COVID-19 yet their test results were negative were also told to self-isolate for 14 days. Individuals who fail to comply with the order may be charged a fine of up to $5,000 and/or may be required to abide by a court order issued by a judge from the Superior Court of Justice.

?It is incredibly important that all community members monitor for symptoms of COVID-19. If symptoms develop, please isolate right away and only leave isolation to seek testing for COVID-19,? says Dr. Oglaza . ?Our case investigations show that individuals are not always following public health guidance and are ignoring symptoms and delaying testing, which puts everyone in the community at risk. If you feel sick, please make a responsible choice and get tested to protect yourself and others.?

Symptoms of COVID-19 include:? Fever 37.8 degrees Celsius and over? New onset of cough? Muscle aches, joint pain and tiredness? Difficulty breathing (shortness of breath)? Tiredness? Sore throat? Headache? Runny nose? New loss of taste or smell? Gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g., nausea, stomach pain, diarrhea)

Those who were unable to attend the testing day in Loggers' Field, but still want to get tested can book an appointment at the testing centre at the Bancroft Hospital, or the stand alone testing centres in Belleville or Trenton, by calling HPEPH at 613-966-5500.