

Investments in remote learning coming for COVID-19 hotspots, including York Region

As new cases of COVID-19 continue to surge across Ontario, particularly in Toronto, Ottawa, Peel and York Region, the Province of Ontario is ramping up funding for remote learning opportunities for students.

Premier Doug Ford and Education Minister Stephen Lecce announced a \$35 million investment to hire more staff and provide further infrastructure to targeted communities on Monday.

The money is allocated from the Province's previously-announced \$1.3 billion plan to safely re-open classrooms. Monday's funding will go towards providing increased distancing between students through the hiring of additional teachers, early childhood educators and educational assistance, while also providing remote learning supports through the hiring of more teachers and other educators as well as provide devices to families who have opted away from an in-class experience.

Our priority as we enter the flu season is to ensure our schools take every preventative measure possible to ensure students and staff remain safe, said Mr. Lecce. We are delivering this additional funding targeting those communities with higher rates of transmission to ensure we prevent the spread and maximize the safety of Ontario families.

York Region's inclusion as a targeted community came as two Aurora schools were added to the list of educational facilities under surveillance for COVID-19: ESC Renaissance at Bloomington and Bathurst and Cardinal Carter Catholic High School just east near Yonge Street.

Schools under surveillance are those with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 case among staff, students or visitors, where there is currently no evidence of transmission within the school, according to York Region Public Health.

Aurora, as of Tuesday, has 2 active outbreak situations.

At the continuing outbreak at Sunrise Aurora on Golf Links Drive there were 5 residential cases of the virus confirmed at the seniors' residence with a total of 8 confirmed cases amongst the caregiver population.

A third outbreak has also been declared at Chartwell Aurora (formerly Resthaven). By October 6, there was 1 confirmed case of the virus among the staff population. No cases were reported amongst residents. The residence has seen two previous outbreaks of COVID-19 which were subsequently deemed closed by the Region.

A previously reported outbreak at a licensed child care centre is now classified as resolved.

The number of our outbreaks, both in the workplace environment as well as in long-term care homes and other community care settings has been increasing, said Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Chief Medical Officer of Health, in his weekly COVID-19 update. The numbers of cases on a daily basis remains at a relatively high level and the proportion that we cannot attribute to other causes seems to be growing, so it is extremely important that we redouble our efforts to get this outbreak controlled again.

We did it once and we can do it again.

As Thanksgiving approaches this weekend, Dr. Kurji urged residents to limit celebrations to their own household, but if other members of the family are invited to take part in family activities beyond the immediate household, he urged people to restrict their gatherings to no more than 10 individuals and maintain physical distancing wherever possible and to wear masks otherwise.

The flu season is approaching us and very shortly the flu vaccine will be available through physicians' offices as well as pharmacists, said Dr. Kurji. Please remember we encourage everyone over the age of six months to get the flu shot. By getting the

flu shot, we will be reducing the numbers of flu-associated hospitalization, and so keeping healthcare capacity available for COVID-related cases. In addition, we will be reducing the burden on the testing system as it is often difficult to distinguish between flu and COVID-19. Also, in the first wave, we found that many flu-related outbreaks were precursors to COVID-19 outbreaks.

Now, we need to double our efforts with respect to getting this outbreak under control. The rules are the same: physical distancing by two metres or more, wearing masks where physical distancing is impossible or where it is required under the law, and washing your hands frequently, not going out if you are sick, getting the flu shot, and going for testing if you have symptoms or have been in contact with a case of COVID.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter