

Region declares Chartwell outbreak closed, but urges caution

The COVID-19 outbreak being fought by frontline workers at Chartwell Aurora (formally Resthaven) which has claimed the lives of 11 residents over the last two months, has been declared 'closed' by the Region of York.

As of Tuesday, the virus has proved fatal for 14 Aurora residents, with 2 of the deaths outside Chartwell attributed to local transmission and 1 a travel-related case.

The latest fatality reported by the Region is an 87-year-old woman who lost her battle with COVID-19 at Southlake Regional Health Centre on Sunday, May 31. A close contact case, symptoms set in on May 19 and she tested positive on May 20, according to Patrick Casey, the Region's Director of Corporate Communications.

The outbreak at the downtown Aurora long-term care residence was first declared by the Region on April 10, and by the time they downgraded the outbreak status on May 27, Chartwell Aurora was still dealing with 3 active cases within its walls and that remained the case at press time.

In his Friday update, Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's Chief Medical Officer of Health, said long-term care outbreaks across the area were declining but he urged vigilance going forward.

'Four-fifths of our homes that were in outbreak mode have now had their outbreaks resolved,' he said. 'However, there are still some that are very challenging to have the outbreaks resolved. In addition, we have recently seen two more homes that used to be in outbreak mode reappear with outbreaks. We are urging all staff at long-term care homes to get re-tested every two weeks. We [are also] reviewing prevention and control practices everywhere in order to enforce these.'

Proactive testing continues to be a priority for Dr. Kurji. Citing success stories coming out of New Zealand and South Korea in their efforts to control the virus, testing has been 'one of their fundamental pillars.'

'The mantra in some of these places has been 'test, trace and isolate,' he said. 'We are urging anyone with mild COVID-19-like symptoms to go for testing at all three hospital-based assessment centres (at Southlake Regional Health Centre, Mackenzie Health and Markham-Stouffville Hospital) and they are all open during the weekends as well. We are urging folks that may be contacts of cases, as well as workers who may have been in situations where workplaces have got outbreaks, to definitely access testing.'

As active cases within long-term care decline, workplace outbreaks are on the rise, he cautioned.

?Workers tend to get it from the community and then one given worker may pass it to the next and then to the next. These workers tend to take it home to their families so you get household contacts. Some of the workers work in multiple locations and if they happen to be infectious, they happen to take it to those other locations. Sometimes, workers tend to carpool. Sometimes workers from different workplaces carpool in the same car. If one of them is infectious, it gets spread to other workplaces.

?What we do in Public Health is to go into these places, observe and give recommendations. Our recommendations may involve health screening, ensuring the employees are wearing masks, [have] disinfection policies, staggered lunch times, make sure they are giving good sick-time practices so people can be off for 14 days, amongst others.?

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Aurora has seen 103 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 14 of these cases have proved fatal. At press time, there were 11 active cases within Aurora and 78 cases resolved. 55 cases have taken place within Chartwell Aurora, 42 of which were amongst the resident community. 13 additional cases were reported among health care workers.

Of the remaining active cases within the Aurora community as a whole, 8 are related to local transmission, close contact and unknown exposure.

By Brock Weir