

Board of Health

Monthly Report - May 22, 2003

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CONTACT US:

We welcome your comments and suggestions for the Board Report at:
board@healthunit.org



The Response of the Health Unit to the provincial Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) Outbreak

Submitted by Dr. Charles Gardner, Medical Officer of Health

As of May 5th there were 363 cases of SARS in Ontario, with 23 deaths. The great majority of cases have occurred in the greater Toronto area. Fortunately the outbreak is now under control. Without the rapid and intense response of the public health system in concert with the efforts of the thousands of health care workers involved there would have been many more cases and deaths. The outbreak continues in China, highlighting the ongoing need to keep up the new infection control measures that have been put in place.

Cases have occurred primarily from exposures in health care settings and from exposures in the homes of cases. Despite ongoing stringent control measures some cases did occur among health care workers providing care for SARS patients. The occurrence of these cases speaks to the importance of both adhering to infection control practices and evaluating their effectiveness. Cases did occur in certain community settings such as an identified church, funeral homes, family physicians offices, public transit, and in certain workplaces. In all of these instances close contact was involved, as well as the breach of infection control practices such as the breach of quarantine orders. The Ministry of Health maintains a list of all these locations in order to assist health units with case and contact investigations, and public advisories.

In Leeds Grenville and Lanark we have had no suspect or probable cases of SARS. We did have two individuals under quarantine due to a work-related exposure in the greater Toronto area, who did not become cases. We have been involved in the evaluation of a number of potential cases, none of whom have met the cases definitions. As the Health Unit for the district we have maintained close communication with the health care professionals and health care agencies of our district in order to ensure effective surveillance and response to any potential cases, and to assist with the clarification and implementation of infection control protocols provided by the province.

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Response of the Health Unit to SARS

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As a health unit we have also lent our support to those health units most afflicted. We provided staff to do telephone monitoring of quarantined persons in York Region, and we offered such supports to the City of Toronto Public Health Department. From April 4th to 11th Medical Officer of Health for Leeds Grenville and Lanark provided relief work with the York Regional Health Services Department, and assisted with the development of a SARS response unit

at the Public Health Branch of the Ministry of Health. This afforded Dr. Gardner the opportunity to gain valuable experience and expertise contacts that have proven to be helpful to our region.

As the Health Unit for Leeds Grenville and Lanark we continue to work to protect our citizens from health threats such as SARS.

Questions & Answers About SARS

Submitted by Jane Fletcher, Director Clinical Services

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is a severe form of Pneumonia, accompanied by a fever. Containment and early treatment of this disease is essential for public health. Early detection and treatment is saving lives.

How do I get it?

It is believed the illness is spread by droplets from coughing or sneezing, or from direct face-to-face contact with an ill person.

Who is at greatest risk?

Individuals who have had direct contact with a SARS patient, or have traveled to South East Asia, should monitor their temperature and watch for symptoms for 10 days.

What are the symptoms?

Sudden onset of fever (greater than 38° C or 100.4° F) and one or more of the following respiratory symptoms cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing.

How is it treated?

Patients with SARS are treated in hospital with supportive care. Patients are kept in isolation and staff are using personal infection control gear such as gloves, masks and gowns and in some cases face shields.



What is being done?

All contacts of known probable and suspect cases are being quarantined at home for a 10 day incubation period (from the time of their last contact with a “case”) and they are contacted by a Health Unit on a daily basis to monitor for symptoms of SARS. Contacts isolate themselves from their families and wear masks when in contact with other family members.

Resources

www.SARS.gc.ca

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/>



West Nile Virus Preparations

Submitted by Dr. Charles Gardner, Medical Officer of Health

On April 3rd the inaugural meeting of the Leeds, Grenville & Lanark West Nile Virus Community Advisory Committee was held. This body is made up of representation from the municipalities, MOE, MNR, CFIA, conservation authorities and environmental groups, and has the mandate of reviewing and communicating on issues related to West Nile virus in order to provide advice to the Medical Officer of Health. The meeting was very constructive.

From this Committee a working group was struck in order to draft a report from the Health Unit to the municipalities with regard to the roles and activities needed of both parties in order to ensure a sound integrated response to this health threat. The control measures to be used will focus on public education, mosquito breeding ground source reduction and environmental surveillance for the virus. It is anticipated that this report will be completed and provided to the municipalities by mid May.

Tobacco Bylaw Development Update

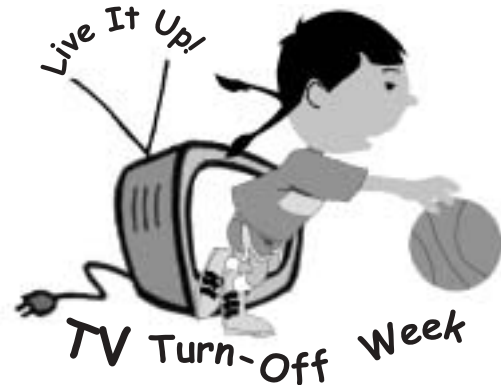
Submitted by Dr. Charles Gardner, Medical Officer of Health

On April 14th the Merrickville Wolford municipal council passed a motion to work with the Health Unit to draft a smokefree bylaw for the consideration of council on May 26th. This is a major opportunity achieved in partnership with the Merrickville and District Community Health Centre, Trihealth Team, and the Merrickville Wolford Community Action Committee. Merrickville Wolford council is to be commended for their leadership in addressing the single greatest cause of occupational disease and death.

At the time of the writing of this report it is also anticipated that the tobacco bylaw review committee for Brockville and Elizabethtown Kitley will present their recommendations to these two municipal councils on May 15th. The Health Unit and our community partners will be attending this presentation, and we will publicly communicate our response to their recommendations.

TV Turn Off Week Challenge

Submitted by Danielle Shewfelt, Public Health Nurse, Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention



We are all ready for another TV Turn Off Week Challenge. This year the Challenge took place from May 5 to May 11. All schools were invited to register for the Challenge. The response rate was very positive with 16 schools participating. Some have certain classes participating while others have the entire school.

We provided each participating teacher with resources to assist them in planning their activities for that week. Prizes will be awarded for best classes in each school. The best class prize is a bag of physical activity games and equipment. There is also a trophy that is awarded to the best school. The winning school will have its name engraved on the trophy and this will be displayed in their school for a year.

The importance of doing this initiative is due to a combination of the rising of obesity rates, the high rate of inactivity, and the unhealthy eating habits of children and youth. The World Health Organization Report from March of this year "blames changing lifestyles with fewer family meals eaten together and more children watching television or playing on computers rather than being outside."

Our hope is that by having this challenge it will promote positive changes for the families with regard to physical activity and healthy eating. We also hope that the children and youth will learn some new activities and games, which teach them that physical activity can be fun. The more children enjoy physical activity the more likely it is that they will continue this behaviour into adulthood and beyond.