



# Renfrew County and District Health Unit

*“Optimal health for all in Renfrew County and District”*

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November 18, 2020

## **RE: A message to Long-term Care and Retirement Homes**

Dear staff, families and/or visitors,

We are now seeing the full effect of Wave 2 of COVID-19 which is worse than Wave 1 both worldwide and in Ontario. Ottawa is a provincial hotspot and locally there were 46 new cases in October in Renfrew County and District. We are also sadly seeing a tragic repeat of outbreaks in long term care across the country.

This past spring cases were mostly related to foreign travel and to outbreaks in the health sector. The key difference between Wave 1 and Wave 2 is that **there is now significant COVID-19 activity and spread in our own community**. For this reason, we need to be extremely careful. Once COVID-19 gets into a residence for seniors, we know how quickly it can spread and what the dire consequences can be.

Along with a number of workplace and school outbreaks, we have had 3 possibly related cases amongst employees in a single home. Luckily this has not resulted in further spread, and it speaks well to the home's current precautions in place.

However, it is time to reassess our practices and to acknowledge that vigilance and strict adherence to the public health measures in place are imperative. This is the only way to get through the upcoming winter months safely.

**I cannot overemphasize the simple fact that if COVID-19 gets into a home, it will come from the community where, to repeat, there is now more activity than we had seen previously.** We must ensure that **staff and families** pay strict observance to the protocols in place, the screening process, routine surveillance testing, and proper infection control practices on site.

Specific challenges include absolute attention to any symptoms that might be COVID-19 related. This means anything from a runny nose to diarrhea. We have regrettably seen examples where people have underestimated or disregarded a symptom because they feel that their work or visit is more important to the residents. Nothing at this time can be more important to seniors than protecting them. Remember also that a significant outbreak could jeopardize the quality of care and the number of visits.

Staff, essential caregivers, and family members have an added responsibility. They are involved with vulnerable people, and therefore must be extremely careful in their private lives away from the seniors' home, to keep their bubble to a minimum and to monitor their own actions, interactions and whereabouts. Avoid any non-essential travel to known COVID "hotspots" and consider delaying visits with vulnerable loved ones after visiting a known hotspot. Even carpooling, for example, can

pose an increased risk and should be done with sanitizer and masks, limited conversation, small numbers (preferably 2) and a backseat-front seat arrangement.

I would ask all homes to carefully review their policies and practices with staff and families at this time. It is only in this way that we can protect our residents and avoid the tragedy we have seen elsewhere.

Thank you for your support on this all-important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RAG', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Dr. Robert Cushman, MD FRCP(C)  
Acting Medical Officer of Health  
Renfrew County and District Health Unit