

WDG Public Health confirms first local case of COVID-19

Written By MIKE BAKER

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) has confirmed the first positive case of COVID-19 in our area.

A man in his 40s tested positive for the infection during a test administered at Headwaters Health Care Centre. He had recently returned from a trip to Atlanta, Georgia.

Dr. Nicole Mercer, Medical Officer of Health and CEO of WDGPH, noted all appropriate infection control precautions were followed during the testing period. The individual is now in self-isolation at home and his case is being followed by health authorities.

"This does not change our protocols around containment of the COVID-19 virus in our area," Dr. Mercer said. "We are following up with any contacts of the individual and ensuring the public is aware and protected from the spread of this virus. It is important to know that 80 percent of people with this virus will have mild to moderate symptoms."

She added, "Anyone who is concerned should phone their health care provider, call Telehealth or visit an assessment centre."

The World Health Organization last Wednesday declared the COVID-19 outbreak, which originated in China, has become a global pandemic. As of 2 p.m. on Wednesday (March 18) there are 213,557 confirmed cases of COVID-19 across the globe, with 8,790 recorded deaths. In China, there are 80,894 confirmed cases and 3,237 deaths. World-wide, 84,314 of those infected have made full recoveries.

On Dec. 19, 2019 Chinese authorities identified a cluster of similar cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, the capital of China's Hubei province. These cases were soon determined to be caused by a novel coronavirus, now referred to as COVID-19. According to WHO, coronaviruses are a group of viruses that are common in humans and are responsible for up to 30 percent of common colds. The danger with COVID-19 is that it is a virus that originated in animals, meaning humans have no immunity to it.

There have been two previous outbreaks of these types of diseases caused by coronaviruses that originated in animals in recent history ? SARS in 2003, which resulted in around 1,000 deaths worldwide, and MERS in 2012, which resulted in 862 deaths worldwide.

Aside from China, COVID-19 has brought many European and Middle Eastern nations to their knees. As of Wednesday, there have been 35,714 confirmed cases in Italy, with 2,978 deaths. Iran has 17,361 total cases, with 1,135 deaths. Elsewhere, Spain, South Korea, Germany and France all have more than 8,000 total cases, with the United States now ranked 8th in terms of total cases, with 7,687 cases recorded nationwide and 117 deaths. In total, 144 countries and territories across the world have recorded confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Here in Canada, we currently have 465 confirmed cases, with 24 new cases recorded in the past 24 hours. A British Columbia man in his 80s, with underlying health conditions, was the first recorded death last week, with four more individuals in the same North Vancouver nursing home passing since Monday evening, and an Ontario man in his 60s became the eighth Canadian to perish from a COVID-19-related cause.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom, Director of WHO, has implored health organizations the world over to ramp up testing of patients showing symptoms of COVID-19.

"Countries must test. They can't fight this blindly. They need to find cases and isolate them," Dr. Adhanom said. "My message to the health ministers today (is) is to invest in testing. They must be able to test all suspected cases. We advise countries to stick to testing

and continue to containment strategies, because we believe this virus is controllable if the right measures are taken.?

Locally, to protect the health of the public and prevent community spread, WDG Public Health is investigating and following up with close contacts of the local man infected.

The best ways to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including COVID-19, are; to wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub, stay home if you're sick, cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or sleeve, clean and disinfect high touch surfaces daily, and call ahead of visiting your health care provider for infectious symptoms so they can plan to protect others from spread. Whenever possible, stay at least two metres away from anyone else.

The Ontario government has reacted swiftly in an attempt to prevent the spread of the disease. It was announced last Thursday (March 12) that all publicly funded schools would be closed until April 5. A total of 180 individuals have tested positive for COVID-19 across Ontario, with more than 1,537 people currently under investigation for the virus. More than 8,460 people in Ontario have tested negative.

On Monday, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced new travel restrictions for people looking to come into Canada.

?'Over the past few days, we have seen COVID-19 spread around the world at an incredible pace. Canada is no different. We assured you, as the situation evolved, our response would evolve too,?' he said. ?'We have decided to take increasingly aggressive steps to keep you and your family safe.?'

Mr. Trudeau, who is in self-isolation while his wife Sophie deals with an infection received during a trip to Europe, revealed that Canada would immediately close its borders to anyone who is not a citizen or permanent resident of Canada or the United States. Canadians who are currently overseas and showing signs of COVID-19, will not be allowed back into the country until they have recovered.

Beginning on March 18, only four Canadian airports will accept international travel - Toronto Pearson Airport, Montreal-Trudeau International Airport, Vancouver International Airport and Calgary International Airport. Restrictions will apply only to people travelling and will not effect commerce and international trade.

?'Exceptional circumstances call for exceptional measures. These measures will help to save lives,?' Mr. Trudeau said.

He went on to ask that Canadians avoid all non-essential travel, and called for those currently overseas to come home as soon as possible.

?'If you're abroad, it's time to come back home. If you've been abroad, once you get home you must self-isolate for 14 days,?' he said. ?'Beyond that, all Canadians as much as possible should stay home. Staying home is an important step to protecting your community and protecting each other.?'

On Wednesday, he and U.S. President Donald Trump announced plans to close the Canada-U.S. border to all non-essential travelling.

Mr. Trudeau mentioned that measures would be implemented in the coming days to ensure Canadians who aren't working, and are isolating themselves at home, would have access to resources to ensure they can pay for things such as rent and groceries.

For local information, visit wdgpublichealth.ca/coronavirus.