

MEMORANDUM

To: Regional Chair Emmerson and Members of Regional Council

From: Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Date: December 15, 2020

Re: COVID-19 Outbreak at Newmarket Health Centre

This memo provides an update on the COVID-19 outbreak at Newmarket Health Centre for York Region Council in its role as Committee of Management

This memo, presented to Council in its role as Committee of Management under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007* (the *Act*) for the Region's two long-term care homes, provides an update on the COVID-19 outbreak at Newmarket Health Centre.

Under the *Act* every southern municipality that is an upper or single-tier municipality must operate at least one long-term care home. York Region operates two long-term care homes: Newmarket Health Centre and Maple Health Centre (the Homes). Under this legislation, York Region Council serves as the Homes' Committee of Management and must ensure the corporation complies with all requirements under *the Act*.

Council receives regular updates on the Homes' response to the pandemic

In [April 2020](#), Committee of the Whole began receiving regular updates on the Region's Social Service Response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The [May 2020](#), [June 2020](#), [July 2020](#), [September 2020](#) and [November 2020](#) memos included information on how the Region's two long-term care homes were responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including measures implemented to protect residents and staff, budgetary and staffing pressures resulting from these unplanned and unbudgeted measures and provincial funding received to assist with the pandemic response.

At the time the November 2020 memo was prepared, neither of the Region's Homes had any resident cases of COVID-19

On November 7, 2020, Newmarket Health Centre was declared in outbreak

On November 7, 2020, Newmarket Health Centre was informed that a staff member tested positive for COVID-19. The Employee Health Unit and York Region's Occupational Health Physician completed a risk assessment to determine next steps in exposure protocols. York Region Public Health was contacted and advised Newmarket Health Centre to place one area (resident unit) under contact and droplet precautions, which are measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus. Staff, residents, families and substitute decision-makers were notified of the positive staff result and follow-up actions were taken, such as testing staff and residents and enhancing infection and prevention control measures. This is the first time a confirmed COVID-19 outbreak was called at a Regional Home since the start of the pandemic.

Subsequently, other staff and residents tested positive for COVID-19

On November 20, Newmarket Health Centre was informed that a second staff member had tested positive for COVID-19. On November 24, 2020, York Region Public Health advised that six residents tested positive for COVID-19. We are saddened to report the passing of a Newmarket Health Centre resident who died on Monday, November 30 after contracting COVID-19. We extend our sincerest condolences to their family, friends and loved ones.

As of December 14, 2020, there are 22 active resident cases and 7 active staff cases. Eleven staff members have fully recovered.

Newmarket Health Centre has a dedicated team of staff caring for the residents who are COVID-19 positive. COVID-19 positive residents are visited daily by one of the attending physicians and the Medical Director reviewing and advising on the care and supports provided by clinical staff.

Daily Outbreak Management Meetings are held with internal and external partners

An interdisciplinary Outbreak Management Team was established to manage the COVID-19 outbreak at Newmarket Health Centre, with representation from the Newmarket Health Centre's staff, the Medical Director, Employee Health Unit, Health and Safety, York Region Public Health, the Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), Southlake Hospital and the Ministry of Long-Term Care. The team met initially on November 9, 2020 to:

- Conduct an initial assessment to contain and resolve the outbreak
- Set respective roles and allocate responsibilities based on the decisions made and actions planned

The team meets daily to receive updates on the status of the outbreak and determine further actions required. Decisions and actions arising out of these meetings are based on mitigating the risk of spread and maintaining the health and safety of residents and staff. Examples include:

- Enhancing screening processes
- Placing Newmarket Health Centre on isolation and droplet precautions
- Pausing admissions
- Suspending tub bathing, communal dining, group recreation activities and all non-essential visits to Newmarket Health Centre
- Increasing staffing numbers on each shift, where possible
- Implementing a staff cohorting plan to prevent the spread of the virus throughout Newmarket Health Centre by having each staff member assigned to a Home Area team, which becomes their work location for the duration of the pandemic
- Increasing cleaning of high contact areas
- Continuing regular testing of staff and residents
- Ramping up recruitment efforts to increase staff base
- Increasing the number of audits in addition to assigning infection prevention and control champions on various shifts to help to monitor compliance with infection prevention and control requirements and the use of personal protective equipment (e.g., donning and doffing)
- Implementing a safe space plan to ensure practicing of physical distancing throughout Newmarket Health Centre
- Increasing the frequency of Joint Health and Safety Committee meetings to ensure members are up-to-date and informed of employee health and safety measures and procedures
- Bringing in expertise from the Region's Public Health Branch, York Region Paramedic Services, Southlake Hospital and Central LHIN to advise on improvements needed and to further support infection prevention and control and personal protective equipment education

Newmarket Health Centre implemented an Improvement Plan to respond to a Ministry of Long-Term Care Compliance Order regarding infection prevention and control

On November 27, 2020, a Ministry of Long-Term Care inspector conducted a critical incident system inspection of Newmarket Health Centre due to the outbreak. The inspector issued a written notification and a compliance order related to the infection prevention and control practices, with the inspection findings published publicly in the [Critical Incident System Inspection Report - November 30, 2020](#), as is usual practice. To respond to the Ministry of Long-Term Care's findings, Newmarket Health Centre developed and implemented an improvement plan that demonstrates how it is meeting each of the three requirements in the compliance order, as described below:

1. Provide leadership, monitoring and supervision in all home areas to ensure staff adherence with appropriate Infection Prevention and Control practices

- The leadership team has daily outbreak management meetings with key stakeholders, as described above, where Southlake Hospital, Central LHIN and Public Health staff provide best practice advice for infection prevention and control and personal protective equipment actions
- The leadership team has established a process for infection prevention and control audits on all shifts for each home area. These audits are reviewed to identify areas of improvement and monitor compliance

2. Provide on the spot education and training to staff not adhering with appropriate Infection Prevention and Control measures

- Ahead of having a dedicated home infection prevention and control expert (hiring decision expected before end of year), Newmarket Health Centre is supported by Public Health Inspectors and an infection prevention and control extender from the Central LHIN who conduct regular infection prevention and control assessments and provide staff with guidance and corrective actions needed
- Staff receive both formal and on-the-spot education and training to support adherence to infection prevention and control measures. With participation from the long-term care management team, daily huddles are held at each shift change to discuss and reinforce infection prevention and control principles and personal protective equipment practices
- Essential visitors and caregivers are also provided with education and training on infection prevention and control and personal protective equipment

3. Ensure that all personal protective equipment caddies are fully stocked and that all caddies have all appropriate personal protective equipment in them

- Personal protective equipment caddies support infection prevention and control measures such as point of care donning and doffing. Dedicated staff ensure that the caddies have all sizes of personal protective equipment available
- There are regular audits of caddies, including enhanced auditing on COVID-19 units
- A dashboard has been created to track personal protective equipment stock levels and monitor adequate supplies. Requests for personal protective equipment from provincial supplies have also been made and received.

On December 7, 2020, the Ministry of Long-Term Care inspector conducted a follow-up inspection of the Home and found that all requirements of the compliance order had been met. There were no further findings of non-compliance.

The Home implemented an Action Plan to respond to recommendations from the Region's Medical Officer of Health

The Home collaborates with York Region Public Health for guidance and advice to manage the outbreak and is implementing specific actions recommended by Public Health to support the resolution of the outbreak by making improvements on the following areas:

- Staffing levels
- Infection prevention and control practices
- Personal protective equipment storage and use

Public Health staff have conducted several infection prevention and control inspections and provided related training and education for the Home's staff.

The Home is working with Human Resources to address critical staffing shortages

There is a critical need for staffing support in York Region's two Homes, particularly at the Newmarket Health Centre.

As reported to Council in [May 2020](#), long-term care staff were required to work for only one employer early in the first wave of the pandemic. When the Region implemented this requirement in March 2020, about 370 long-term care staff chose to remain with the Region, while 94 chose an alternate employer. Newmarket Health Centre has relied on redeployed York Region staff and agency staff to help fill the gaps, but serious staffing shortages remain. To increase staffing levels, Newmarket Health Centre is working with Human Resources on the following tactics:

- Offering temporary full-time positions to: (1) casual staff and (2) staff who are on leave of absence as a result of choosing an alternate employer
- Recruiting staff from external sources and provincial healthcare staffing sources, however the pool of available healthcare workers in Ontario is limited and the competition to recruit healthcare staff is fierce

As community spread increases and daily case counts rise, Newmarket Health Centre's staff are impacted through exposures outside of work (e.g., through contact with potential cases in their households). Self-isolation requirements for people exposed to COVID-19 can further reduce Newmarket Health Centre's staffing levels. To mitigate this, Newmarket Health Centre worked with the Employee Health Unit and York Region Public Health to implement a "Work Self-Isolation" policy, permitted by Public Health Ontario. Under this policy, asymptomatic York Region staff with high-risk exposures can continue working at Newmarket Health Centre provided they wear the required personal protective equipment and follow required infection and prevention control practices at work and outside of work.

Despite these measures, critical staffing shortages continue; more staff are needed to ensure all shifts at Newmarket Health Centre are filled and to reduce risks to residents and staff.

The Corporation is assisting the Homes with the staffing shortage

The Corporation is undertaking several measures to recruit more staff for the Homes. With the support of Regional Chairman Emmerson and the Chief Administrative Officer requests have been made to the nine local municipalities and to Regional staff for staffing supports. The type of work includes:

- Supporting residents indirectly, which involves activities such as inventory control and management (counting and sorting personal protective equipment), making deliveries, or being a “runner” for management, or
- Supporting residents directly, which may involve feeding residents, or providing social supports such as helping them to make a FaceTime call to a family member

The process for onboarding redeployed staff is currently being finalized.

Wellness supports are being promoted to staff

Communications to staff working in the Homes regularly include information about the wellness supports available to them:

- Employee and Family Assistance Program line is available 24/7
- First Chat is also available on the myEAP app. This is immediate text-based counselling with a counsellor
- Colleagues in Paramedic Services have reached out to offer the services of their Peer Support Team for Long-Term Care staff who want someone to talk to
- A new Crisis Counselling hotline has been set up for staff in Long-Term Care and Senior Services

Maple Health Centre’s suspected outbreak has been declared closed

On November 22, 2020 a staff member at Maple Health Centre tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. As a result, York Region Public Health declared the facility to be in suspect outbreak. Further swabbing of staff and residents did not result in any additional positive COVID-19 cases. On December 12, 2020 Public Health notified Maple Health Centre that the suspect outbreak is declared closed.

Our primary goal continues to be the protection of our residents and staff

We continue to implement pandemic response measures according to the emergency orders, directives, and advice provided by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Long Term Care and York Region Public Health. Newmarket Health Centre remains committed to maintaining a safe environment for staff and residents during this most challenging time.

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Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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