

New pandemic healthcare service: Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre

March 27, 2020 - In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre (RC VTAC) has launched today to strengthen access to primary care for all Renfrew County residents.

The RC VTAC is a collaboration between Renfrew County Primary Care teams, the County of Renfrew Paramedic Service, Renfrew County Hospitals, and the Renfrew County and District Health Unit, with the support of Ontario Health East.

The RC VTAC is a primary care solution to reduce the demand on Emergency Departments and provide Renfrew County residents, who do not have a family physician or cannot access their family physician, with the appropriate level of care when they have any health concerns (including concerns related to COVID-19).

“The number of COVID-19 cases is increasing exponentially in Ontario,” said Dr. Jonathan Fitzsimon, Clinical Coordinator, Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre. “We must slow this spread, protect our healthcare professionals, and yet continue to provide care and advice for all residents of Renfrew County. The RC VTAC will help enormously in our efforts to do this. The sheer hard work, as well as the collaboration and cooperation between so many organizations in Renfrew County, to develop this new service at lightning speed has been truly incredible.”

Through the RC VTAC, physicians and nurse practitioners will assess and manage health concerns in multiple ways depending on the individual’s needs. This includes:

- Phone appointments
- Video appointments
- In-home assessments and diagnostic testing by community paramedics
- Remote monitoring and alerting and if necessary, escalation to a designated team of physicians and allied health professionals for the management of patients with COVID-19
- Referral to other services including mental health support

Paramedics will be integrated into the RC VTAC and work collaboratively with the nurse practitioners and physicians. If a call is received for a patient who requires hands-on assessment, a referral will be sent to the community paramedics and a care plan will be developed.

“Community paramedics will be using the tools they have already found successful to apply an extension of the model of care already being provided to the residents of the County of Renfrew,” said Mike Nolan, Chief, The County of Renfrew Paramedic Service. “This new approach allows the community paramedic a direct link to a physician for a patient who may

not be able to reach their family doctor, or who does not have a family doctor. Historically, these would have resulted in 911 calls and transportation to Emergency Departments.”

Dr. Robert Cushman, Acting Medical Officer Health, Renfrew County and District Health Unit added:

“This system will provide all residents, who must self-monitor for symptoms, quick access to telephone assessments by highly-skilled healthcare professionals. Equally important, it will reduce the number of people coming unnecessarily to clinics and hospitals, thereby reducing the spread of infection. It is worth repeating that the primary duty of every citizen is to stay home, and when out for only essential shopping or some fresh air, to keep more than six feet away from others.”

The volume, type of intervention provided and wait times will be monitored closely and reported to Ontario Health East to ensure the RC VTAC is meeting the needs of Renfrew County and reducing the demands on hospitals.

“We are extremely pleased to be part of this partnership that has created a much-needed service for those in our region given the current circumstances,” said Pierre Noel, President and CEO of Pembroke Regional Hospital. “The new Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre is a home-grown solution to ensure all residents have safe and easy access to primary care when they need it, reducing the need to visit the Emergency Department except for true emergencies.”

For up-to-date information or general inquiries about COVID-19, visit the Renfrew County and District Health Unit website: www.rcdhu.com.

If you live in Renfrew County, have a health concern (including a concern related to COVID-19) and need to speak to a physician, you should first call your family physician’s office.

If you do not have a family physician or cannot access your family physician, call the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre at **1-844-727-6404**. A medical receptionist will connect you with care and support from a nurse practitioner, family physician and/or community paramedic. This new service is covered by OHIP with a valid health card.

Learn more at www.rcvtac.ca.

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