

COVID-19 Assessment Centre now operating in Bancroft

May 5, 2020 By Nate Smelle

Two weeks ago Quinte Health Care began operating a COVID-19 Assessment Centre in Bancroft. QHC's vice president and chief transformation officer Jeff Hohenkerk has been spearheading the development of assessment centres throughout the region. While QHC has been leading the initiative, he says the centre has been made possible courtesy of several community partners, including the Bancroft Family Health Team, Hastings Prince Edward Public Health, Hastings-Quinte Paramedic Services, and local municipal leaders. By using a community-wide collaborative approach he says they are acquiring a clearer understanding of the needs of local communities during the pandemic. "The idea is to ensure that we put together provisions and a centre so therefore we can minimize any risks to our front-line staff as well as the patients and the community that we serve," says Hohenkerk. "So, the intent is really to understand the COVID-19 environment in the Bancroft area. "Because of the testing being done at the Bancroft centre as well as at the other centres in Belleville, Picton and Trenton, Hohenkerk says they are getting a better sense of the extent of the pandemic's spread throughout the area. To access the assessment centre's services, he says residents first need to call the COVID-19 Assessment Centre Hotline at: 613-332-2825 ext. 2222. At this stage in the process, Hohenkerk says individuals are screened over the phone by a health-care professional to see whether a further assessment is required. If an individual does need to be tested, he says they will then be given an appointment at the centre closest to their place of residence. Highlighting how it is always better to be safe than sorry, Hohenkerk says "We want people to call the number when in doubt and we will direct them regarding what to do. If it is not COVID-19-related we will direct them to their family physician; and/or if it is severe we will actually advise them to go to the emergency department. So, this is actually a multi-pronged assessment centre where we assure that everyone gets the care they need." As of last Friday, Hohenkerk says they had conducted 57 tests in the Bancroft area through the centre. By following the Ontario Ministry of Health's guidelines, he says they are able to ensure that all the appropriate people are being tested. In Bancroft, Hohenkerk says so far 97 per cent of the people who have called the assessment hotline have been tested. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, he says it is essential that people monitor their own health and contact the hotline if they have symptoms of the virus such as body ache, cough, fever, headache. Whether an individual who calls the hotline requires testing or not, Hohenkerk says QHC makes sure that their health-care provider follows up with them after they are screened. Recognizing that many people do not have access to a family doctor, he says they also have physicians working with the centre that will contact people to ensure that the individual's symptoms are not worsening. Taking into account that there are also many people in the region who possess mobility and/or transportation issues, Hohenkerk says they are working with paramedics to make sure everyone who needs to be tested is assessed. If someone calls the hotline and cannot make it into the centre for such reasons, he says they will arrange to have a paramedic test them where they reside. Noting how they have been testing people in their homes every day, he says their partnership with the paramedics has been working exceptionally well. "On a daily basis we give our paramedics a list of patients who need to be seen and they work with us to ensure that the testing is done in the person's home," explains Hohenkerk. "They have also been working with us to swab every long-term care patient and staff as well " making sure that we are caring for our most vulnerable population. We are very focused on making sure that population stays really safe. "While the Bancroft centre is located at the local hospital, Hohenkerk says it is essential that people do not just show up at the clinic without an appointment because it is not a walk-in clinic. In order to keep front-line health-care professionals and other patients safe, he says it is crucial that anyone who may be exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 to first call the hotline. However, if an individual's symptoms are severe and causing them to have difficulty breathing, he said they should immediately go to the hospital or call 911. The Bancroft COVID-19 Assessment Centre Hotline is available seven days a week from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. at: 613-332-2825 ext. 2222.