

# DSB paramedics have completed over 200 in-home COVID-19 tests

By Tom Sasvari - May 15, 2020



*Paramedics Dan Tremblay, Craig Hood, Ashley Dieks, Jennifer Hamilton and Clayton Courtney have been busy giving at-home COVID-19 tests. Missing from photo is Chris Gillis.*

ESPANOLA – Six paramedics with the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (DSB) have completed over 200 home patient tests as part of a COVID-19 testing team.

“First of all, with May 1 being First Responder Day, I would like to wish all First Responders our greatest respect and admiration,” said Robert Smith, chief of paramedic services at the DSB. “That is a key part of this; each of the six members that is on the COVID-19 team is among the many paramedics who had volunteered for this program. The vast number of our 142 paramedics in the DSB area stepped up to volunteer. They are a wonderful group with a wonderful sense of community.”

Mr. Smith explained that in early March Dr. Penny Sutcliffe, medical officer of health for Public Health Sudbury and Districts (PHSD) had requested partner agencies to attend a meeting to look at alternative modes of COVID-19 testing. At that point she had suggested that leveraging the community paramedic system during this pandemic would prevent situations where people who might have COVID-19 from going into a health care facility and exposing them to others that might be vulnerable to the virus.

“She reached out to the hospital system as well, and we first began working with the Espanola hospital (March 25) in providing the mobile tests to residents in the LaCloche

area (Township of Sables-Spanish Rivers to Greater Sudbury),” said Mr. Smith. From there, requests were made by the Sudbury East area.

“And then around the first week of April the Manitoulin Health Centre (MHC) requested if we could help out on the Island as well,” continued Mr. Smith. As of April 13, paramedics work Monday to Friday in Sudbury East, LaCloche and the Manitoulin area. “We operate two to each team of paramedics, one to do the actual swab testing with PPE (personal protective equipment) on, and the second paramedic on hand (also with proper PPE), to act as a safety officer during the testing and making sure the exact same process is used the exact same way in the testing every time, and make sure there is no breach of protocols. We want to ensure the safety of the staff members and the patient.”

The DSB area covers 45,000 square kilometers, and there is a population of 28,000 people within it.

“We are doing a fair number of tests,” said Mr. Smith. “The process mostly involves vulnerable people, which tends to be elderly persons who are not physically feeling well to begin with.”

Mr. Smith pointed out the paramedic testing appointments are booked by calling the in-person assessment centres at Manitoulin Health Centre. If the hospital feels that the best way to have the testing done for an individual is through a home visit, they make arrangements for the appointment through DSB.

The test sample is then returned to the lab through the referring hospital, generally provided through Health Sciences North or the lab in Timmins, and results come through the health unit within 24-48 hours.

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