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Dufferin small businesses offered rapid COVID-19 testing kits

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The Dufferin Board of Trade (DBOT) has joined a province-wide initiative that looks to help local businesses better track asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 in workplaces.

Launched in Dufferin County last Thursday (May 6), the new program provides free kits for rapid COVID-19 testing to local businesses with 150 employees or less.

?It gives the business owners and the employees more of a reassurance that they're doing everything possible to keep their employees and our communities' safe,? said Diana Morris, executive director for DBOT, about the program. ?This doesn't take the place of wearing masks, social distancing, and sanitizing, but gives one extra level of protection to help prevent the spread.?

Through the program employees are able to test themselves twice a week, every week, and have the result back within 15 minutes. If an employee's test is found positive or inconclusive, they're sent for further testing.

Recent information on COVID-19 suggests that one-third of cases are asymptomatic and over 50 percent of known cases are transmitted by an asymptomatic carrier.

The Dufferin Board of Trade says the program will drastically increase the opportunity to detect carriers early and reduce the spread of the virus.

The COVID-19 rapid screening program is part of the Provincial Antigen Screening Program, funded by the provincial and federal government. The program launched last month as a pilot project in the Waterloo Region, in partnership with the tech company Communitech. As part of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce network, the DBOT was able to bring the project to Dufferin County.

The province has provided the DBOT with an initial 20,000 kits to distribute, but more will be reordered as needed.

?We have a contract to provide kits, at least until the end of August,? said Morris.

Morris adds that businesses are able to return every two week to receive another two week supply of the kits.

Local small businesses looking to receive the testing kits will first have to fill out an agreement form found on the Dufferin Board of Trade website. A ?screening supervisor?, responsible for the program at their workplace, will be chosen by the employer and will receive training on the screening process.

Businesses will need to track results such as the number of tests, positive cases and negative cases, which are reported back to the province.

?We hope that businesses will see this as an opportunity to enable them, this is one more tool kit that they have, and use it to help their businesses, their employees, and the community,? said Morris.

COVID-19 rapid screening kits are available to local small businesses as of May 7.