



## REPORT TO THE POLICE SERVICES BOARD

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Author: Superintendent Peter Cousins

Date of Report: Sept 1st,  
2020

Subject: COVID-19 Risk Look-Up Tool Web Portal  
(the "Portal")

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### RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board receives for information the review of the use of the subject Portal by the Durham Regional Police Service during the period April 15<sup>th</sup> through July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

Signed:   
Chief of Police

Date: Sept. 7/20

### OVERVIEW

On April 13, 2020 the Ontario provincial government made an order pursuant to the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (the EMCPA order) which provided police services across the province with certain limited information regarding COVID status of individuals and/or addresses through the **COVID-19 Risk Look-Up Tool Web Portal** (the "Portal"). Access to the Portal was provided to 911/communications personnel only. The purpose of the Portal was to enable the 911/communications staff to assist dispatched first responders in making assessments and taking appropriate steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The DRPS used the Portal for this purpose and this purpose only.

### PORTAL ISSUES

The Province did not warrant that the information available through the Portal was complete, accurate, or up-to-date. It also indicated that there may be inconsistencies in address information within the Portal. Indeed, the information in the Portal was discovered to be extremely unreliable, as there was little consistency in how the information was inputted into the Portal by the Province.

Due to the inconsistencies related to the information contained within the Portal, DRPS Communications/911 personnel developed wildcard-style, broad-based municipal searches that would allow Portal results to be obtained more comprehensively. For example, it was known that a significant number of COVID-19 tests were conducted at a local long-term care home, yet when the address was entered on the Portal, it returned no results. As the search was expanded using wildcard parameters, results were eventually obtained. That practice was widely used until

June 11, 2020 when Communications/911 personnel received a copy of an All Chief's memo regarding the terms of use of the Portal. From that date forward, the number of broad-based municipal searches conducted by DRPS personnel was reduced substantially. By email dated June 29, 2020 the Province notified the DRPS about the use of broad-based municipal search parameters and the Ministry requested these search methods not be utilized. In response, DRPS took further steps to eliminate the use of these methods despite the inaccurate returns that resulted from the recommended methods in some cases; however, there were certain limited examples of these searches being utilized by Communications / 911 staff after this direction was given. As a result, the DRPS was notified that its access to the Portal would be terminated, and indeed access was terminated approximately 5 days prior to the Ministry shutting off access to the Portal entirely to all police services province-wide.

Whereas other police services simply stopped using the Portal because of its deficiencies, the members of the DRPS Communications / 911 Unit continued to work within the Portal to find ways to best utilize the tool, and therefore prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the community. These efforts often required additional and/or multiple queries using similar spellings and/or punctuation to ensure the correct information contained within the Portal was identified relative to a particular incident. These efforts explain why the Durham Regional Police Service accessed the Portal more than any other service.

## DRPS USE OF THE PORTAL

In order to facilitate Portal checks in a real-time environment, sixty-seven (67) DRPS Communications/911 Unit members on four platoons were authorized to access the Portal for this purpose. Only active Communications / 911 personnel had access to the Portal, and consisted of call takers, dispatchers, and supervisors who were responsible for answering calls for service, dispatching officers, and supervising the operation of the Communications / 911 Unit. Communicators were directed to check addresses and names of members of the public if the front line responders being dispatched were going to have in-person contact with them/that address.

The Portal platform contained a document (Users Manual) embedded within it that provided instructions on use of the Portal; however, it was not downloadable and could not be printed or saved. There was no training provided by the Ministry of Health to the DRPS, and all members were expected to navigate the Users Manual to conduct the required checks. There were a few members of Communications that used the Portal first, and then provided to the other members the method to search that gave the best returns. This was done during the first week of Portal access.

In addition to making queries to the database, civilian members of the DRPS Communications/911 Unit asked citizens, when possible, to voluntarily disclose if COVID-19 was present when officers were dispatched to scenes. Most citizens were very co-operative and shared this information willingly, to help keep officers safe.

## STATISTICS



Through the use of the portal, the DRPS identified 10,500 incidents where no COVID-19 test was associated to the location and/or person, and about 200 incidents that were associated with a confirmed COVID-19 test. It is important to note that no personal health information was entered on DRPS systems as a result of Portal access. Rather, the DRPS Communications/911 staff made notes on the call cards for these 200 incidents to indicate that a COVID-19 test was associated with that incident, but had no information about whether the test(s) were positive or negative.

Durham Regional Police Service was unable to self-audit any activities through the Portal. All audit information was provided from a Standards Development Officer at the Policing Standards Section, External Relations Branch, Public Safety Division, Ministry of the Solicitor General. The DRPS received periodic snapshots of information on usage and activity from the Province but the number of times the Portal was accessed by DRPS was not known until the Province provided the data.

The Portal was accessed for incidents where responding officers would be involved in person-to-person contact with members of the public. It should be noted that although the number of calls where this would have occurred during the period the Portal was active was 46,379, the number of queries made on the Portal was 24,623. Additionally, the **total** number of DRPS incidents generated during the time the Portal was active was 72,835.

## PRIVACY OF INFORMATION

The Service did not extract or record any personal identifiers which may have been available through the Portal. Rather, the Communications / 911 members would simply indicate in the call card whether the address where officers were being sent was associated with a positive or negative COVID test.

The Durham Regional Police Service always understood that upon the termination of the Portal access (and per the original directions set out by the Province), any information retained would need to be redacted. Accordingly, our call cards were coded in order to identify and redact those entries. There is no specific information being retained from the Portal, only an indication as to positive or negative on Portal within the call card. In any event, this information has been redacted from our systems. This information is not linked to an individual but to a call card for a particular incident number. Now that the information about a Portal query being positive or negative has been redacted, it will no longer be contained in the call data or incident number linked to that call card.

The DRPS treated its access to the Portal and the information contained therein seriously and with due care. The DRPS 911 communicators' efforts to effectively use the Portal (which contained several deficiencies) were only for the intended purpose of protecting our front line members and to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 within the community.