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Dal Psychologist Warns Of Lockdown's Toll

May 20, 2020

Lyndsay Armstrong

A **Dalhousie University** professor and clinical psychologist is concerned **Nova Scotia's** cautious approach to reopening amidst COVID-19 is dangerous.

Dr. Simon Sherry, who has been studying the impact of the pandemic on potential suicide rates, said the provincial government is sharing a "deceptively simple narrative" of the coronavirus pandemic, and that the impact of isolation and underemployment on mental health has been overlooked.

"I think we need to approach easing restrictions and opening our economy with a greater sense of urgency," Sherry said.

"Confinement and sedentariness and unemployment are corroding the health of Nova Scotians."

Sherry said domestic violence, substance abuse and undiagnosed health problems including heart disease are among his concerns.

Premier **Stephen MacNeil** announced Tuesday that reopening would likely happen in early June (see story this issue), but Sherry said that isn't soon enough.

He's calling for the government to release all-cause mortality data to get a picture of non-coronavirus deaths, which the province hasn't done since mid-March.

"There is an unacceptable delay in the reporting of those statistics, it's absolutely critical data," Sherry said.

"There are real consequences to measures of social isolation, not to mention having to shut down businesses and people's livelihoods," said **Dr. Susan Kirkland**, the head of the department of community health and epidemiology at Dalhousie and a member of the federal COVID-19 immunity task force.

But she says the province's cautious approach is vital to preventing a drastic second wave.

"If we don't pay attention and open up too fast and we have another surge, we'll have to go completely into lockdown again. If we have to keep doing this over and over again, it will not serve anyone," she said.

Kirkland said the pandemic has highlighted issues in access to mental health, and she hopes necessary changes are made to better support the struggling individuals.

"We've known for a long time we have a poorly devised system for dealing with mental health in our broad health care system... What COVID-19 has shown us is just how fragile that is," she said.

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