

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, January 13, 2015

## **NHS, Public Health urge caution during flu season**

Niagara Health System and Niagara Region Public Health are urging residents to take caution if they have flu-like symptoms and also want to provide tips for people to stay healthy during the flu season.

In the past two weeks, NHS has had a high number of Emergency Department and Urgent Care visits, as well as admissions to hospital of patients suffering complications from the flu, especially amongst the elderly and nursing home residents.

Public Health reports that the vast majority of cases are Influenza A, and a few are Influenza B. Currently, there are 17 outbreaks in long-term care and retirement homes in Niagara.

Niagara Health System and Public Health discourage visiting friends and family in hospitals or long-term care facilities if you are ill with the flu or have flu-like symptoms.

Most flu cases can be treated by visiting your family doctor or a walk-in clinic. The Emergency Department or Urgent Care Centres are the best option if you are having significant shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, feeling extremely ill, feeling extremely weak or having severe chest pain. If you think you are critically ill, call 911 immediately.

Here are some tips for the flu season:

### **Signs of the flu**

Flu symptoms usually start one to four days after exposure to the virus. In most healthy patients, the flu causes a few days (usually less than four or five) of generalized symptoms, especially fast onset of fever, chills, aches and pains, headache, and generalized weakness and tiredness. The cough, however, starts more slowly and often lasts one to two weeks. Other symptoms may include, runny eyes, stuffy nose, mild vomiting or diarrhoea, and sore throat.

“The vast majority of flu patients will recover within a couple of weeks with no issue,” says Dr. Rafi Setrak, NHS Deputy Chief for Emergency Medicine at the St. Catharines Site. “Those at risk of complications are the elderly, the very young and patients with preexisting medical problems like asthma, heart failure or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Anyone who feels they require immediate care should not hesitate to go to a Niagara Health System Emergency Department or Urgent Care or to call 911.”

## How can I avoid the flu?

- Get the flu shot (For a list of where to get a free flu shot, visit: [www.ontario.ca/health-and-wellness/get-flu-shot/](http://www.ontario.ca/health-and-wellness/get-flu-shot/))
- Wash your hands often
- Keep an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (gel or wipes) nearby
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Avoid touching your face
- Keep common surfaces and items clean and disinfected

## What if I get the flu?

- Stay home and get plenty of rest (avoid visits to nursing homes and hospitals, unless it is for treatment).
- Drink lots of fluids
- Avoid drinks with caffeine
- Treat muscle pain and fever with Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen in recommended doses. You can use a hot water bottle or heating pad for achy muscles — apply heat for short periods of time and avoid if you are febrile
- Take a warm (not hot) bath or shower
- Gargle with a glass of warm salt water or suck on lozenges
- Use spray or saline drops for a stuffy nose
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco

## Call your doctor or health care provider if:

- You don't start to feel better after a few days
- Your symptoms get worse
- You are in a high-risk group and develop flu symptoms

## More information

For more information, call Niagara Region Public Health Infectious Diseases program at [905-688-8248](tel:905-688-8248), ext. 7330, or toll free [1-888-505-6074](tel:1-888-505-6074).

You can also call Telehealth at [1-866-797-0000](tel:1-866-797-0000) to talk to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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