

Widespread and Peak Influenza Activity in Simcoe Muskoka

Attention: Physicians, Long-Term Care Homes, Rest and Retirement Homes, Emergency Departments, Nurse Practitioners, Infection Control Practitioners, Occupational Health Professionals, Walk-In Clinics/Urgent Care Clinics, Neighbouring Health Units, Midwives, Family Health Teams, Pharmacies, NSM LHIN, Central LHIN, CCAC, County of Simcoe Paramedic Services, Medavie EMS Ontario – Muskoka, Rama Mnjikaning EMS

Date: January 5, 2015

Effective January 5th, 2015, the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit is declaring widespread influenza activity in Simcoe Muskoka. Influenza activity is currently at the peak of this wave. Widespread activity is defined by Public Health Ontario as “multiple ongoing laboratory-confirmed influenza outbreaks in institutions separated by some geographic distance, in other words, non-adjacent areas”. The formal declaration, which includes informing Public Health Ontario of the local situation, serves as a signal to health care partners to enact policies and strategies to control the further spread of influenza.

As of January 2, 2015, there have been 15 lab-confirmed influenza A and one influenza B institutional outbreaks in Simcoe Muskoka since September 1, 2014. In addition to the 47 outbreak-related cases, there have been 77 community lab-confirmed cases. The flu A specimens sent for further subtyping have all been H3. The National Microbiology Laboratory has found evidence of antigenic drift of the circulating H3N2 strain. “The majority of H3N2 influenza specimens are not optimally matched to the vaccine strain which may result in reduced vaccine effectiveness against the H3N2 influenza virus. However, the vaccine can still provide some protection against H3N2 influenza illness and can offer protection against other influenza strains such as A(H1N1) and B”. (PHAC FluWatch: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch/>).

Consider timely administration of antivirals (e.g. Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) or Zanamivir) to persons at high risk for influenza complications presenting with influenza symptoms, regardless of immunization status, particularly in the coming weeks when it is expected that influenza activity will increase and peak. The Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease Canada have posted guidelines and an algorithm at <http://www.ammi.ca/guidelines>.

Persons working in institutions experiencing confirmed influenza outbreaks are recommended to take Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) prophylaxis, 75mg once daily until the outbreak is over. This is required for unimmunized staff, and this year, is also recommended to immunized staff due to the H3 strain drift. There is a shortage of Tamiflu in some areas of Simcoe Muskoka. For the purposes of influenza outbreak control, if staff or residents are unable to access Tamiflu through local pharmacies, please contact the health unit as soon as possible, as there may be access to the provincial stockpile in Toronto. More details on the control of respiratory outbreaks are available at <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/flu/guide.aspx>.

All lab-confirmed influenza cases and institutional respiratory outbreaks are reportable to public health to ensure timely follow-up. For additional information or to report influenza cases and respiratory outbreaks please contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Communicable Disease Team at (705) 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 extension 8809.

Public Health Ontario's Ontario Respiratory Virus Bulletin can be accessed at: <http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/ServicesAndTools/SurveillanceServices/Pages/Ontario-Respiratory-Virus-Bulletin.aspx>