

## Update on the Influenza and Respiratory Season

**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, Midwives, Family Health Teams, RICN

**Date:** January 13, 2016

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**Simcoe Muskoka is currently experiencing a milder than usual influenza season. To date, we have had 26 lab-confirmed cases of influenza vs approximately 250 cases at the same time last year. Since a very early flu outbreak in October, we have not had any institutional influenza outbreaks in our area.** It would appear that the most common circulating respiratory illnesses are caused by agents other than flu, with rhinovirus (the common cold) being the most prevalent at 14% positivity on lab testing vs only 3% for influenza as of the end of December. Recent respiratory outbreaks in Simcoe Muskoka with identified agents have been caused by para influenza.

Our local emergency department syndromic surveillance system has indicated a peak in patients presenting to emergency departments with respiratory syndrome at the end of December, that trend is now on the decline at local hospitals.

### **What will happen for the rest of the season?**

It is unclear as to what is going to happen with influenza in the upcoming weeks and months. **Influenza A (H3N2) (the dominant strain last season) has been responsible for about 60% of influenza A cases, while H1N1 about 40%. The fact that H1N1 seems to be having an increasing proportion of the influenza A cases is good news, as the population has better natural and vaccine immunity against H1N1 vs H3N2.** We may have already seen the peak of our influenza A wave at the end of December, if it follows the usual peaking of respiratory syndromes each winter. If this is the case, it would suggest a mild flu A wave this season, potentially due to this year's improved vaccine effectiveness. However, it may also be the case that the influenza A wave is delayed this year, and the usual 8 to 12 week wave of influenza A is yet to come. What is also not known is the role of influenza B this year, as the B wave usually arrives sometime between February and April. In Australia, their last influenza season was predominantly influenza B. **The bottom line is we are currently experiencing a mild influenza A season and hope that it will stay that way. We also need to remember that how the influenza season behaves in any given season is unpredictable, and that getting the influenza vaccine at this time is still the best protection.**

For current surveillance information in regards to the circulation of influenza and other respiratory viruses, please note the following weekly reports issued by Public Health Ontario:

*Ontario Respiratory Pathogen Bulletin* contains information about influenza activity and can be found at: <http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/ServicesAndTools/SurveillanceServices/Pages/Ontario-Respiratory-Virus-Bulletin.aspx>