

Health Care Column

Stay Flu Free over this Festive Season

By Dr. Gary Bota, Emergency Department Lead for the North East LHIN



December 23, 2016 - While some parents will pull-up the Santa tracker just before Christmas, at this time of year I'm focused on a different type of tracker – watching the progression of influenza across Ontario.

The influenza or the flu, is a contagious respiratory infection that is caused by a virus. The flu is starting to appear now and is expected to peak during the first two weeks of January. Last year was a relatively mild flu year, perhaps due to the success of immunization campaigns. Nevertheless, there will still be a bump-up of cases in the coming weeks and it's not too late to get your flu shot for this year. So be prepared and don't become one of Canada's statistics – one of the 12,200 hospitalized or the 3,500 who perish from the flu each year.

No one wants to spend the holidays with the flu or to have to make an urgent trip to the Emergency Department (ED). As a long-time Sudbury ED physician, I've helped many people of all ages cope with medical situations over holidays. I've got a few suggestions to stay healthy and well...

Get your flu vaccination!

While it's advisable that everyone get a shot, some people have a higher risk of complications, such as pneumonia, including seniors, children under five-years, pregnant women, people with underlying health conditions, and indigenous people. Flu shots are available through your primary care provider, local public health unit, pharmacy, and workplace wellness clinics. Children, between the ages of six months to four years, can only be vaccinated at a family physician or nurse practitioner's office or health unit. To find out the nearest place to get your free flu shot, check out this map at www.ontario.ca/page/get-flu-shot as well as other facts.

Wash your hands. Often. Encourage your loved ones to wash frequently as well, as this is a good defense against colds and flus. Use hot water and soap and rub hands together for at least 20 seconds.

Consider options for non-urgent care. If you're not feeling well and your situation is non-urgent, there are several options for care beyond your local emergency

department. Contact your primary care provider – family physician or nurse practitioner. Check the location of the nearest walk-in clinic or get free access to a Registered Nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week through the Telehealth Ontario service at 1-866-797-0000 or (TTY): 1-866-797-0007.

On behalf of my colleagues in Northeastern Ontario who provide you with health care throughout the year, I wish you and yours the very best of health and happiness for the holiday season.

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