

Flu season peaking in January

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health is warning residents across the county that flu season is peaking now.

"In Ontario, the peak influenza activity usually occurs in late December - early January. Our local surveillance systems already report elevated influenza activity which might be reaching peak this week [Jan. 9]," said public health medical officer of health resident Dr. Piotr Oglaza.

A Quinte Health Care (QHC) release said its hospitals had seen seven respiratory outbreaks in long-term care homes and retirement homes across the region Jan. 10 - five were influenza. It said there had been 12 cases in its community and several other respiratory viruses were circulating the region including respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), parainfluenza, rhinovirus, and corona virus.

"Influenza is transmitted through respiratory droplets and can lead to tonsillitis, ear infections, and pneumonia," explained Oglaza. According to QHC, there has been a 32 per cent increase to its hospital's emergency departments. The number of visits per day rose from 290 to 372.

Oglaza recommended staying out of the ER where possible.

"Most healthy adults can safely manage flu at home. Not everybody with flu-like symptoms is at the same risk for complications or requires care at the hospital," explained Oglaza. It's worth noting that for people who are especially vulnerable to respiratory illnesses, such as the elderly, now is the time to start looking into things like life cover quotes, to make sure that your loved ones are covered in case the worst happens. Oglaza went on to say, "When possible, it is always best to talk to your primary health care provider who knows you and can recommend the best course of managing your illness."

He added, "If the primary health-care provider is not available, we encourage all otherwise healthy people with flu-like symptoms to seek advice from Telehealth Ontario prior to going to the emergency departments. That way you might be able to prevent lengthy wait at the emergency department when you do not really need any medical interventions and it will also make the emergency care more accessible and timely to those who need it most."

The health unit recommends getting vaccinated to protect against the flu. It is still available in Bancroft and surrounding area.

"The majority of circulating influenza viruses in Canada have been identified as being genetically similar to the strains that the vaccine was intended to protect us from this season. The true measure of vaccine effectiveness will come from the analysis of data after the flu season is over when we look at the overall rates of influenza among immunized and unimmunized individuals," said Oglaza.

He suggested, however, that at this point the vaccine might take a few weeks to fully immunize those who receive it.

"Although the best time to receive the influenza vaccine is in October, November, December before the peak of influenza season, the influenza vaccine is still available at public health offices, pharmacies and health care providers," said Oglaza. "Immunizing now is still safe but it may not provide the same level of protection as immunizing earlier during the season as it might take up to two weeks to develop protection from the influenza vaccine."

Other ways people can protect against the flu include frequent hand washing, coughing and sneezing into the bend of your arm instead of your hand, avoiding touching your nose, mouth or eyes with your hands. Additionally, purchasing good quality [N95 mask\(s\)](#) from online stores could protect people from the virus on loose.

Extra care can also be taken to clean objects and surfaces that a lot of people touch, such as doorknobs, phones, television remotes. Also, eating healthy food and staying physically active would keep the immune system strong. Also remember to get a plenty of rest or sleep.

"If you do get sick, stay home and avoid contact with other people until your symptoms are gone," said Oglaza.