

Hospitals flooded with flu patients

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Radhika Panjwani

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Mississauga's two hospitals are reporting as much as a 30 per cent increase in patients flocking to the emergency rooms with flu-like symptoms.

Health care workers at both the Credit Valley Hospital (CVH) and Trillium Health Centre (THC) were so inundated with patients presenting H1N1-like symptoms that they decided to create a separate flu triage area within the hospitals.

"We've seen a 30 per cent increase in patients in the last two days in the ER alone," said Wendy Johnson, chief, communication and public affairs. "These are primarily people with respiratory problems and people concerned that they may have H1N1."

Officials at THC said they experienced a 28 per cent increase in patients, mostly children, visiting their ER.

"We can't say if all those cases were H1N1, but they were viral-type influenza," said Derek McNally, director of the surgical and the emergency health system. "I can't confirm if it was a panic in the community, but, across the GTA, there was a surge in ER capacity. Our job is to meet the needs of the community and have contingency plans to manage."

Johnson said majority of the 689 patients treated in the last two days were children and as a result of the gridlock there are no beds available in the paediatric ward.

"Yesterday (Wednesday) within a two-hour period, we set-up a flu triage area in the ambulance bay area which we closed to create a new waiting area for those patients with respiratory symptoms so that they could be segregated from the rest of the emergency patients," Johnson said.

Trillium Health Centre has a similar flu triage set-up.

Officials from the hospitals said they had to turn away people hoping to get their H1N1 shots and some that wanted the hospital to do the screening for the H1N1 influenza – both of which does not fall under the hospital's mandate.

Meanwhile hundreds of people waited for more than three hours in line to get the H1N1 vaccine yesterday (Wednesday) at a clinic set-up by Peel Health.

The current wait-time at the clinic at International Centre in Malton is up to five hours. Peel Health officials are urging people without any underlying medical conditions to visit the three clinics in Mississauga starting Nov. 2.

Many pregnant women in Peel will however have to wait: While other regions in the GTA are offering the vaccine at clinics, Peel officials are asking pregnant women and children six months to one years of age to see their family doctor.

That decision has upset least one pregnant Mississauga resident.

"I am absolutely disgusted with the Region of Peel," said Carolyn Wolkowich. "I am 22 weeks pregnant and the Ministry of Health is telling me I need to be in the front of the line and I need to be seen because of the risk of complications, but I can't get that vaccine."

Wolkowich said she plans to get the shot from a clinic in Halton Region.

H1N1 clinics for the general public open next Monday and run until Dec. 11. They will be held Monday to Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the International Centre, located at 6900 Airport Rd., and Blessed Trinity Catholic Church, located at 2495 Credit Valley Rd. An additional clinic was added at Bronte College, 88 Bronte College Crt. from 3 to 8 p.m. on Nov. 19.

For more information on clinic dates, time and locations, visit www.peelregion.ca or call 905-799-7700.