

Flu season may be 'record breaking' for Peel

DANIELLE EDWARDS

This winter's flu season is shaping up to be a particularly nasty one ? and hospitals in Peel are feeling the crunch.

"We're at the point right now that we can call it a surge officially," said Dr. Naveed Mohammad. "We've seen numbers go up in the last 48 hours."

Mohammad is William Osler's vice president of medical affairs and he said that because of this year's flu "things are going to get a lot more hectic over the next two to four weeks" and this might be "a record breaking season" for flu cases.

It's why hospitals in Peel are preparing for the onslaught. Mohammad said all of the William Osler sites ? Brampton Civic Hos-

pital, Etobicoke General Hospital and the Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness ? have to be "hyper-vigilant" with their infection control procedures. He explained they start preparing for the flu season as soon as the previous one ends and during winter, staff are encouraged to get the flu shot. Staff that aren't vaccinated, however, have to wear masks while they are working with patients.

Prediction analysis ? mapping out the number of cases in previous years ? is also used to forecast the severity of the season.

There is a blackout put in place during the winter that prevents staff from taking too much time off as well, he said.

William Osler has also added 59 beds ? 37 of which

will be at Brampton Civic ? which should help ease any overflow in the emergency department, according to Mohammad. The rest are going to Etobicoke General.

There are a few factors that have contributed to this year's unusually harsh flu season.

The flu outbreak that was experienced by Australia, New Zealand and countries in Asia have been an indicator of what's to come since the virus tends to travel overseas.

"Their flu season this year was much more severe. The number of cases were much higher and the number of hospitalizations were much higher," said Mohammad, adding "the effectiveness of the flu vaccine, especially in adults, was not as good as the previ-

ous years" in the Southern Hemisphere, and the same is expected here as well. Mohammad attributed this to mutations in the virus that make it resistant to vaccines.

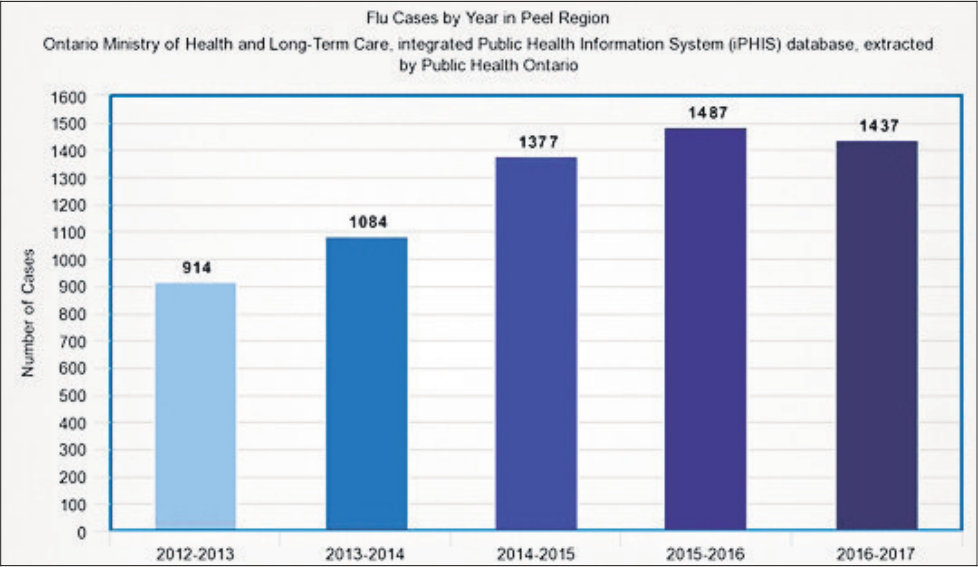
It's still early on in the season, but Dr. Monica Hau said the possible severity of this flu season is because there are two different

strains of the flu circulating at the same time. In other years, the two strains tended to appear one after the other. Hau, associate medical officer of health for Peel Public Health, said that "a mix of the strains simultaneously" along with the early start to the season are some of the reasons why Peel region might

have to deal with a miserable winter this time around.

The 2016-2017 flu season saw over 1,400 cases of the flu in Peel region. The largest spike happened in January 2017.

So far this season, almost half of reported flu cases are patients who are 65 years or older.



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