

# Flu season 'very quiet', says Halton's top doc

By **LISA TALLYN**  
Staff Writer

So far this flu season there's been a lot less fever, chills and coughing in Halton thanks to a dramatic drop in the number of flu cases.

"It's been a very quiet season up until this point in regard to influenza," said Halton Regional Medical Officer of Health Dr. Robert Nosal.

Nosal said most years in Halton there are 200 lab-confirmed cases of influenza A or B during flu season (November through April) and in fact there could be thousands of actual cases because most people don't go to their doctors when they have the flu—a respiratory illness that spreads rapidly from person to person.

But, so far this flu season, there have only been three lab-confirmed cases in Halton. Those cases were in Oakville and Burlington—two were young children; the other an elderly person.

"In other years, by this point, we would have a lot more than three," said Nosal.

The trend in Halton is also the case province-wide said Nosal.

So far there have been only 57 lab-confirmed influenza cases in Ontario. Nosal said normally that number would be in the hundreds, or even thousands.

Other markers of flu activity Halton Region Health Department monitors is the absenteeism rate in schools, emergency room visits and outbreaks in long-term care facilities.

"All the data fits," said Nosal.

He said to date there have been no influenza outbreaks in long-term care facilities. However, there are currently five outbreaks in those types of facilities of enteric (norovirus) illnesses (three facilities) and respiratory virus-

es (two) that aren't the flu.

Last year in Halton Nosal said there were a lot of flu cases in November and December, but traditionally most of the cases occur after the holiday season.

So why has the flu season been so mild so far?

"I don't have a reason that I can pinpoint," said Nosal.

He said some say it's due to the mild winter so far, which he said was a possibility.

"I don't know why it's less," he said.

But Nosal stressed the picture can change.

"The flu can occur right up until March or April. The season is by no means over," he said.

Halton Region Health Department has held 33 flu immunization clinics this season and immunized 13,800 people against the flu.

The Region's last regularly scheduled flu immunization clinic will be held today (Thursday) from 4-8 p.m. in the auditorium at the Halton Regional Centre in Oakville.

Nosal said with the potential for flu cases still to come this season it's not too late to get a flu shot.

"It's important to remember that in Canada, flu season typically runs into March or April. This means it's still possible to get sick with the flu in early spring," said Nosal. "We have seen some influenza activity in the community this year and getting the flu shot is the best way to protect yourself and to prevent spreading the virus to others."

In addition to getting the flu shot it's important to wash your hands frequently with warm, soapy water, cough and sneeze into your arm, not your hand, and stay at home when you're sick.



**DR. ROBERT NOSAL**

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