



SEASONAL SWEET SOUNDS: The Junior choir at McKenzie-Smith Bennett entertained a standing room only crowd of appreciative parents at last week's Christmas celebrations. - Traci Gardner photo

Halton's mandatory food handler certification approved

Regional Council approved and passed the by-law respecting Mandatory Food Handler Certification last week to help reduce the risk of food-borne illness in the community. The by-law requires an owner or operator of a food establishment to ensure there is at least one certified food handler working during all hours of operation.

Starting in January 2011, Halton Region's Health Department staff surveyed residents' opinions regarding the potential of a mandatory food handler certification by-law. Results showed that 87 per cent of the adult Halton residents included in the survey think that food handler training in restaurants, take-outs and other food premises should be compulsory.

"Ensuring food safety is one of Halton Region's key initiatives as laid out in the Citizen's Priorities Action Plan," said Gary Carr, Halton's Regional Chair. "Passing this by-law is an important step that will encourage safe food handling practices and will add an extra level of quality to local business."

To support owners and operators in Halton, the

Health Department will continue to offer several options for food handlers to complete the training including online study guides, a full-day course and on-site training. In addition to these services, there are a number of recognized private companies that provide both online and in-class training options. Several chain food establishments also provide their own food handler training as a condition of employment. On average, the Halton Region Health Department currently trains between 500-700 food handlers per year.

"Research has shown that the risk of food-borne illness is reduced in food premises with trained staff," said Dr. Bob Nosal, Halton's Medical Officer of Health.

There will be a three year phase-in period for affected food premises to comply with the new by-law. Those premises affected by the by-law include high-risk and moderate-risk food premises, including full-service restaurants, hospitals, and long term care centres. Examples of moderate-risk food premises are bakeries, fast-food restaurants and take-out services.

Top 10 Tips to Avoid Catching the Flu

Easy ways to stay healthy through the holiday season

Ontario is offering everyone ten helpful tips to stay healthy and reduce the risk of spreading the flu and other viruses to your friends and family this holiday season.

1. The best way to avoid the flu: Get the flu shot. It's free.

The flu shot helps your body build the defences it needs to protect you from the flu. It can prevent the flu from taking hold up to 90 per cent of the time among healthy adults and children.

2. Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly and often.

Proper hand cleaning guards against and limits the spread of many illnesses. Viruses can live on your hands for up to five minutes and they can live on hard surfaces - like counter tops and telephones - for up to two days. Wash hands for at

least 15 seconds.

3. Keep alcohol-based hand sanitizer handy.

Hand sanitizer needs to be at least 60 per cent alcohol to be effective. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are as good as soap and water to clean your hands. But if your hands are visibly dirty, wash with soap and water.

4. Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze.

Cough into your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue. The droplets that come out when we cough or sneeze can carry the flu virus and land on other people or surfaces.

5. Stay home from work if you are sick.

When you're not feeling well, the best thing you can do for your own health and the health of your co-workers is to stay home.

6. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

The flu virus usually enters the body through the eyes, nose or mouth,

and your hands touch objects and surfaces that may have viruses on them, including the flu virus.

7. Avoid large crowds of people where viruses can spread easily.

This might be a challenge when you're shopping and socializing during the holidays. Stay aware of your health and the health of others when you're out and about. Avoid people who are sneezing and coughing and wash your hands regularly.

8. Clean germ-spreading surfaces like purses or gloves.

These items come in contact with contaminated surfaces when you set them down on areas like tables and countertops, spreading germs and viruses. Wipe these surfaces with disinfecting cleaner regularly.

9. Eat well, exercise and get enough rest.

Keeping your immune system strong will lessen

your chances of getting sick. Eat well, exercise regularly and get enough sleep to keep your health in top shape.

10. Did we mention get your flu shot?

We can't emphasize this enough. The flu shot is the most effective way to avoid the flu. Get the vaccine for free at your doctor's office.

QUICK FACTS

- You cannot get the flu from receiving the flu shot.

- The flu can leave people ill for up to seven days and can lead to serious health problems such as pneumonia.

- Flu strains can change every year. The vaccine that protected you last year may not fully protect you from the type of flu going around this year.

- The elderly, young children, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems are especially at high risk of flu-related complications.

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