

# HEALTH CARE

## Pandemic flu: Be prepared, not scared

Many people have questions about pandemic influenza. What is it and how does it start? Why is bird influenza a concern? What can individuals do to prepare?

Outbreaks of respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses occur every year. This is known as seasonal influenza. Influenza viruses spread easily from person to person when infected people cough or sneeze. The virus, travelling on tiny water droplets, comes into contact with mucous membranes of the nose, throat, or windpipe, and possibly the eyes, and causes infection. The virus can also survive for short periods of time on hands and objects such as doorknobs. Hands can become contaminated and in turn transfer the virus to the nose or eyes.

Influenza viruses go through small changes every year. On rare occasions, a big change may happen that can result in a very different influenza virus. Because no one would be immune and a vaccine takes time to manufacture, the new strain of virus could infect many people as it spreads around the world. This is pandemic influenza, a worldwide outbreak of a new influenza virus. It spreads the same way as seasonal influenza and has similar symptoms. A person may have fever, headache, aches and pains, tiredness, stuffy nose, sore throat, a cough, and a need to be in bed. However, pandemic influenza can lead to even more serious illness and death.

Bird (avian) influenza is a disease caused by influenza viruses carried and spread among birds. Health officials around the world are watching the spread of the H5N1 type of bird influenza for many reasons. The virus is infecting millions of birds in many countries. A small number of people have also become ill in the affected countries. Illness in people has occurred from handling sick and dead birds. Fortunately, this virus has not been able to



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spread easily from person to person. As more birds and people are infected with the virus, there is concern that changes in the virus may allow it to spread easily from person to

person, potentially causing a pandemic.

If pandemic influenza does spread to Ontario, you can reduce your risk by doing the same things that help protect you from seasonal influenza. Good hand washing with soap and water is the best way to stop the spread of viruses and other germs. Use an alcohol-based hand rub when soap and water are not available. Get your influenza shot every year. Although the seasonal influenza shot would not protect you from a pandemic influenza strain, it would protect you from seasonal influenza so that your immune system would not have to fight two types of influenza at the same time.

Having a home emergency plan is always a good idea. This can include an emergency kit for you and your family. A home emergency plan and kit can help you get through many types of emergencies including pandemic influenza. Checklists and guide books for home emergency plans and kits are available on the Halton Region Health Department's website, in the pandemic influenza section. Your personal actions can help protect you and your family.

For more information, contact Halton Region at 1-866-4Halton (1-866-442-5866), TTY 905-827-9833, or visit [www.halton.ca](http://www.halton.ca).

*Health Notes is prepared by staff of Halton Region's Health Department.*



## Kiwanis Club aids HOPE

The Kiwanis Club of Georgetown recently made a generous donation of \$7,500 to Hope Place Centres, which runs drug and alcohol related programs for men and women all over Halton Region. On hand for the presentation were (from left) Georgetown Kiwanian Brett Worby, Hope Place Centres executive director Jacqie Shartier, and Georgetown Kiwanians Melanie McCracken and president Janet Allison. *Photo by Ted Brown*

## Need a doctor? Website can help



Halton Region's website [www.halton.ca](http://www.halton.ca) now makes it easy for residents to connect with newly recruited family physicians in Halton Hills, Milton, Burlington and Oakville. Up-to-date contact information is provided for the family doctors, all of whom are welcoming new patients to their practices.

"We are pleased to be able to offer this additional help to people in our community who are looking for family physicians," said Halton Regional Chair Gary Carr. "More and more people are using the web to find the information they need and this is a very good example of how we can use our website to make it easier for people to access services".

The listing of new doctors is provided by the Halton Physician Recruitment Initiative which was established in 2002 to address Halton's shortage of family physicians through a comprehensive marketing and promotion strategy. It is a collaborative effort between Halton Region and representatives from the local municipalities of Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville, local physicians and senior area hospital staff.

For more information on Halton Region's Physician Recruitment Program, call 1-866-4HALTON or visit [www.halton.ca](http://www.halton.ca)

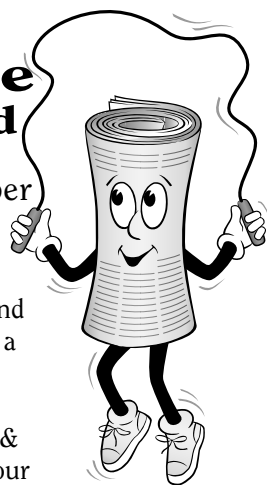
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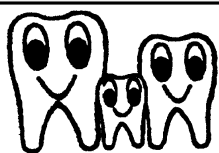
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