

HELP YOURSELF AND THE HEALTH SYSTEM - GET A FLU SHOT

If you have had the experience of going to a hospital in southern Ontario recently, especially if you entered through the emergency ward, there is a good chance you experienced first-hand what it's like when hospitals are stretched to the limit. ERs are jammed. Corridors can be lined with beds occupied by people waiting for a bed. Harried staff do the best they can, and they nearly always do a good job, but they, too, are stretched to the limit.

You may have waited hours in the ER, you may have received hallway health care. You have or are experiencing what it's like in one of many Ontario hospitals that are operating at more than 100 per cent capacity.

Now try to imagine what it could be like when thousands of Ontarians, stricken by the flu, flock to ERs for treatment. Try to imagine the incremental strain on staff and facilities. Imagine the impact on already overburdened ambulance and paramedic care. This isn't fear mongering. It's a real threat.

Average citizens cannot fix what's wrong with Ontario hospitals. But what if there was something you could do to reduce - by as much as half - your chances of ending up in a jammed ER or hospital corridor?

There is, and it's not hard. It won't cost you any money. It's free. All you have to do is go to a pharmacy, your doctor's office, a public clinic or another location that administers flu shots. Simply by doing that, you will be reducing by 50 per cent the chance of catching the flu. Add in good hygiene - following proper handwashing guidelines, for example - and you can reduce your chances even more.

Given all this, and the unpleasant alternatives, you might think the majority of sensible Canadians would get vaccinated against the flu. You'd be wrong. Experts say only about one-third of Canadians get flu shots. If you're among the two-thirds who don't, you're part of the problem.

Why don't more people get flu shots? In part, it's the fictitious scare tactics of the anti-vaxxer movement. In part, it's that the vaccine can sometimes cause you to feel ill, although not nearly as ill as if you got the real thing. But yes, sometimes side effects like fever and chills do happen as your body begins to make antibodies to ward off the bug. Some say no because they think they can actually catch the flu from the vaccination. You can't. The vaccine has no live flu virus component - you cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine.

Public health officials say this year's vaccine is deemed to be about 50 per cent effective. It's not perfect, but is better than other recent years. And more importantly, it's the best chance you have of avoiding the flu virus. It makes no sense - absolutely none - to say no to a flu shot. It's actually irresponsible given the critical situation in public health. Be part of the solution, not the problem.

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SNAPSHOT



Donald Clements photo

A fox catches some rays outside a home near Rattlesnake Point Conservation Area. Got a great local photo you'd like to share? Send it to sleblanc@metroland.com.

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY THIS WINTER

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE, WRITES FOSTER



KEVIN FOSTER
Column

Well now, that was a relatively quick transition from autumn right into winter.

It's quite a shock to one's routine when the seasons change almost overnight. With winter also comes increased risk of home fires, injuries and fatalities.

Are you planning to have a home fire this winter? It may seem like a silly question to ask. Sadly, it WILL happen. I hope that it doesn't happen to you, but many people will have an unplanned fire in their home this winter season.

Take a moment to think about how quickly your life would change if you

had a home fire. It doesn't always happen to someone else.

This winter, make sound decisions to protect yourself and those you care about most. Winter storms cause dangerous and often treacherous conditions resulting in icy roads, broken power lines, drifting snow and extremely cold temperatures.

With that, there is an increase in home fires caused by heating equipment, candles, cooking and misuse of electrical equipment.

Now is the time to take action before it happens to you. The fire service has spent countless hours reaching out to inform members of our communities about the hazards and sources of home fires, encouraging you to have working smoke alarms for early detection and an escape plan ready to be able to get out safely.

We, and many other safety organizations, have been educating you on the impact of alcohol and

drugs when doing higher risk tasks such as driving and cooking. We are doing our part, now it is up to you. This is your call to action.

If you are unsure of what to do to improve fire and injury prevention in your home and daily activities, there are numerous online resources that you can access from the comfort of your home. A great place to start is at the Milton Fire Department's website: MiltonFire.ca.

You can also Google the National Fire Protection Association to find helpful resources.

I wish everyone a safe and enjoyable winter.

Kevin Foster is the acting chief of the Milton Fire Department

WEEKEND EVENTS

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