

Water studies to be completed in February

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Gritty, brown water will likely continue to plague Milton until the manganese problem is solved.

So the Region has been working on a solution at least since last fall, said Halton's director of environmental services Ric Robertshaw.

"It's an issue we see as a serious one, and one we're spending a lot of

time and effort to resolve," he said.

So far, there appears to be two main options. The expensive version is to filter out the manganese. But that would require the construction of a \$2.5 million filtration facility.

The cost would be split by ratepayers across the region through their water bill.

But preliminary testing has shown

the troublesome mineral is concentrated in the bottom layer of the aquifer.

So a less pricy option would be to simply block that layer from entering the water system — at a cost of approximately \$250,000.

But more studies are needed to ensure that plan is viable, said Ms MacDonald. Final test results are expected in February, at which time

the Region will make a presentation to Milton council on the issue.

In the meantime, a wrap-up of a 1999 trunk main swabbing project is continuing. That should be completed by the end of the month. It involves sweeping the water mains free of tiny particles of iron, manganese and calcium that build up in the pipes.

So far, small and mid-sized pipes

have been swept. But new valves need to be installed in the large trunk main coming out of Kelso to allow cleaning swabs through.

A continuation of the project is set to launch in April. Once the large main has been completely swabbed, small and mid-sized pipes will likely be tackled again to ensure the problem is beaten.

Influenza dangerous to elderly

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"What we've done is basically closed the unit so people who have not been immunized would not go in it," said Ms Lanza, who is a registered nurse.

Though there hasn't been a fatality in the unit, the flu can be dangerous to the elderly or others with compromised health.

"It can be much more serious. The elderly population is much more susceptible to the flu" said Ms Lanza. "They don't mount the same flu response as young people do."

And that defense can be further compromised by ill health.

In the past month, five long-term-care (LTC) facilities in Halton have also been slammed by the flu bug.

But an aggressive immunization program that has seen 95 per cent of LTC residents and 90 per cent of LTC staff receiving the flu shot is nothing to sneeze at, said Halton's Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal.

According to an often quoted British study, immunizing LTC staff reduces the likelihood of flu-related deaths by 44 per cent, said Dr. Nosal.

But reducing the death toll isn't the same as eliminating the illness, he warned.

"The vaccine for you and I would be 80 to 90 per cent effective," explained Dr. Nosal. "For the elderly, it's only 40 to 50 per cent effective to prevent illness, but it's 80 per cent effective to prevent death."

So far, there has been one confirmed flu-related death in a Halton LTC facility, said Dr. Nosal. The death occurred within the past two weeks.

But the general public has also been slammed by the flu bug. And that has put the bite on the hospital's emergency room, which was flooded over the holiday season.

Throughout December, the emergency department at MDH coped with an average of 110 to 120 patients per day. On Boxing Day, that swelled to 184 patients. That corresponded with a tide of activity throughout the Greater Toronto Area, said Ms Lanza.

"We're no exception. Everyone's services are stretched to the limit at holidays," she said. "We're trying to respond."

Cases of the transmittable disease often soar at holiday times because people are more apt to get together. Victims of the miserable illness then flock to hospitals since some family doctors and clinics work reduced hours over Christmas.

But an early onslaught of the flu this year may be behind the unusual surge of cases over the holidays. Typically, the flu season begins in November or December and peters out in April.



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