

Flu shots now free for those over six months

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Free flu shots are nothing to sneeze at.

And in an effort to ease the annual holiday hospital crunch, free public flu vaccinations will be offered as early as next month.

The Province announced in late July that any resident over the age of six months is now eligible for a free flu shot, Halton's Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal told the Region's Health and Social Services committee Tuesday.

The expanded program will bolster Halton's own aggressive vaccination campaign.

Last year, the Region called for the sweeping immunization of at-risk residents, as well as healthy individuals who come in contact with at-risk individuals, such as the elderly or ill.

That includes workers at hospitals or long-term-care facilities, who risked being sent home for refusing to take the shot last year.

In 1999, about 60,000 Halton residents considered to be in the high-risk category were immunized.

In the expanded version, the Ministry of Health expects up to 90 per cent of high-risk residents to be immunized, as well as 60 per cent of the general population, according to a Regional staff report.

If that comes to pass, some 197,000 additional Halton residents could be immunized by the end of this year.

Broad-based vaccination is expected to take place through hospital and community clinics, school clinics hosted by the Halton Regional Health Department (HRHD) and work clinics put on by employers.

All this is set to kick off early next month for those in the high-risk category.

The general population can expect their immunization to take place in the months of November and December.

But broadening the scope of the campaign begs the question of who will administer the vaccine, said Dr. Nosal.

"The question is who will put the shot in the arm," he said. "We have a severe shortage of physicians all through Halton."

And that deficiency is mirrored in the nursing field, he added.

Offering the vaccine free of charge to all residents is meant to prevent massive and

dangerous gridlock in emergency rooms over the Christmas season.

But a 60 per cent goal in the general public may be tough to achieve, warned Dr. Nosal.

"We've only been able to get 60 per cent of the at-risk people immunized," he said.

Though there's no cost to the public for the shot, the Province will pay the HRHD \$5 for each administered shot.

That's meant to cover the costs of the campaign, including increased staffing.

The costs are to be paid up front by the Region, then collected from the Province at the end of the campaign.

And that means strict accounting should be kept, said Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale.

"I'd like an audit at the end to ensure we get 100 per cent of the revenue back," she said. "Otherwise it's another transfer of health care."

But despite its problems, the beefed up campaign received wide support around the committee table.

"Although it hasn't been terribly well-thought through, it is a step in the right direction," said Ms Mulvale.

Burlington Councillor Lynda Schreiber was anxious to see the project get off the ground.

"I hope we can overcome the hurdles," she said.

One of those hurdles is staffing costs. If Provincial estimates are on target, Halton may need to hire or contract the equivalent of about seven new nurses and one clerk during October and December to handle the demand.

"We'll offer it as extra employment for own staff," said Dr. Nosal. "But we'll have to hire a significant amount of staff."

Still, the benefits outweigh the difficulties, he said.

"We certainly support it."



Dr. Bob Nosal

Andrew seeking a second term

Halton District School Board Trustee Erica Andrew is seeking re-election in Milton.



Erica Andrew

Her first term in the role will wrap up in November.

During her tenure at the board, "the pace and scope of change in education has continued to accelerate," said Ms Andrew. "School systems in Ontario face many challenges."

To address them, Ms Andrew was instrumental in setting up a policy governance model for the board, which aims to provide guiding principles for the future.

"The duty of a school board is to govern through sound policies," said Ms Andrew. "I am a strong advocate of a policy governance model."

Throughout her three-year tenure with the board, Ms Andrew has sat on various committees and struggled with the emotional issue of school closures.

Ms Andrew was also at the forefront of a drive to bring junior kindergarten to Halton.

She feels her contribution has been valuable to the board and the parents and students she stands for.

"I have worked very hard to represent Milton and to help provide quality education services and programs for our students," said Ms Andrew. "I am passionately committed to this role and to public education."

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In our September 13-19, 2000 flyer, the following error occurred:

- The HP 6735 Intel Celeron Processor 663 MHz on the front page was advertised in error. It should have been advertised with a Processor of 633 MHz.

We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused our valued customers.

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