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2 Woman dies despite living minutes away from hospital; local family demands answers.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

EVENT: Child car seat clinic
WHEN: Jan. 15, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
WHERE: Thornhill fire station, 884-1133



10 The end of the Muslim month of Ramadan is celebrated by breaking the holy fast.

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Flu-free? You're one of the lucky ones

Access restricted to seniors homes

BY JENNIFER BROWN
Staff Writer

Call it the real Y2K bug. As the new millennium begins, it is queasy stomachs sick from the flu, not computer glitches, that are causing trouble for hospitals and nursing homes.

Following an outbreak of influenza A, York Region's public health department is restricting visitation to seven of the region's 10 homes for the aged and is investigating another nine retirement homes.

"It's high for the region in general and for being this early in the season," said Faran Kolbe, manager of infectious diseases at the public health department.

Visits to homes for the aged affected by the flu are now restricted to family members only.

The serious strain of flu is also pushing already busy hospital staff to the limit.

"In the general population, a lot of what we're seeing in emergency and walk-in clinics is influenza. If you haven't had it, you're one of the lucky few," said Grace Volkening, manager of infection control at York County Hospital.

In some cases, people are falling ill to a nasty combination of normal flu symptoms, combined with vomiting and diarrhea.

See FLU, page 3.

Slip sliding away



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Mason Posival, 2, gets a hand from his mom, Tanya Posival, after his successful first skate at the Stouffville Rec Centre Tuesday.

ER crisis batters York hospitals

Ambulances ordered to bypass local emergency wards

BY JENNIFER BROWN
Staff Writer

In her 30 years as a nurse and two decades in the ER, Dale Smith hasn't seen anything like it before.

This week, the York Central nurse and emergency room co-ordinator had 18 patients on hold in the hospital's emergency department. They were all waiting for beds — and some had been there for three days.

"They're stable, we try not to hold critical care patients," explained Smith, co-ordinator of emergency medicine at York Central.

In the past week, Smith has worked what seems like endless shifts of overtime as the hospital struggles through a desperate period.

The emergency ward has been so busy, the hospital has been forced to go on critical care bypass (CCB) several times — which is supposed to mean that all ambulances and patients will be turned away, no matter how sick they are.

But even when the hospital is on CCB, Smith said they have still been accepting critically ill patients because they know most hospitals across the GTA are in the same mess.

"If they tell me they have a code 4 (life threatening) with chest pain, they do come in. But we tell them we may have to treat them on the ambulance stretcher. At least it prevents them from going elsewhere into the community," said Smith.

"Paramedics are very frustrated and worried that patients will come to a bad outcome."

See NO END, page 3.

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