

# Students pulled over SARS fears

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN  
Staff Writer

Parents of several Grade 1 students have pulled their children out of a Unionville elementary school, fearing the spread of SARS.

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome prompted Ontario to declare a health emergency Wednesday. There are nine confirmed cases in York Region; 700 people have been quarantined.

Blake Reeves is upset officials at All Saints Catholic School haven't demanded students who visited Hong Kong over the spring break be quarantined.

"They are not ordering anyone home and that's what I have a problem with," Mr. Reeves said.

"A number of neighbours, who also have children in the class, are pulling them out. It's shocking the school is not erring on the side of caution."

He said school officials have told parents they are monitoring students who travelled to the Far East for SARS symptoms.

York Catholic District School Board spokesperson Chris Cable confirmed that policy.

"We are following very closely the directives of the health depart-

ment," she explained. "Just having travelled to Hong Kong is not a reason to quarantine, unless people are displaying symptoms."

"People who have been in contact with Scarborough Grace Hospital are the ones who must voluntarily quarantine themselves. That has been very clear."

She said she understands parents' concerns; she has a son in the system as well.

"We are providing as much information as possible to parents, we are in close contact with the York Region health department and we are doing everything we can in following its directives."

An information letter was sent home with students Thursday, another went out Friday, she added.

"People have to look at the facts and not just deal with fear and panic. Ultimately, it's up to parents to decide if they want to keep students home and we respect that."

Mr. Reeves believes anyone who has travelled should voluntarily quarantine himself. He's also concerned some parents may not be receiving the required information because of language barriers.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Louise Pogue and other staff members at Markham Stouffville Hospital wear protective masks Thursday afternoon while advising visitors and patients about restrictions designed to stem the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

# Local patients in stable condition

From page 1

ing the building Friday to ensure its safety, as it has been empty for some time.

"The Town of Markham has been working closely with the hospital to set this up," said Markham Mayor Don Cousens said.

"It will be the segregation ward because it's a stand-alone building, not connected with anything else."

Dr. MacLean said the four SARS patients are in serious but stable condition, none are critical. Two patients were confirmed Thursday, the other two on Friday.

All elective surgery, outpatient clinics and diagnostic testing at the hospital have been suspended.

The emergency room remains open for now, but patients are being asked to wear masks, gowns and gloves to prevent the spread of the illness from people who may have early symptoms but don't know it.

"We have to serve the community and patients have to have somewhere to go," Dr. MacLean explained.

Access to visitors is being denied except in the most critical

of cases. If they are admitted, they must wear protective clothing, as does all hospital staff.

The four new cases bring to 16 the number of probable cases in York Region, with 700 people quarantined.

Fifteen cases have been confirmed in the Greater Toronto Area, with a total of 28 across the province. Thousands of people remain in quarantine.

Three people have died.

The first confirmed case at Markham Stouffville is a hospital staff member, directly involved in patient care, who also works at Scarborough Grace Hospital, the first hospital to receive SARS patients.

Those patients had recently returned from a trip to Hong Kong, where they came in contact with a medical professor from China's Guangdong province, thought to be ground zero for the virus. The professor died March 4.

The second MSH patient, a female, was a patient at Scarborough Grace hospital during the time the illness is thought to have spread between March 16 and 26.

"There's no test to immediately

confirm the diagnosis, but the collection of symptoms meets all the SARS symptoms, along with an abnormal X-ray," Dr. MacLean explained.

He declined to release anything more about the other patients.

## Fifteen cases have been confirmed in the Greater Toronto Area

Provincial directives the hospital is coping with include prohibiting Scarborough Grace staff from working at any other health care facility, the suspension of any hospital-to-hospital transfers, and that hospitals establish isolation units to prevent further spread of the sickness.

"I had hoped we wouldn't be exposed, we got through the Norwalk virus relatively unscathed," Dr. MacLean said. "But our proximity to Scarborough Grace and the fact a fairly significant number of staff members also work there made it a possibility."

"If someone has had close contact with anyone with SARS, they

likely have been contacted by the health department already. If there is no close contact, if someone was just visiting the hospital, there's likely nothing to worry about."

Dr. MacLean added the mortality rate is only about three per cent. "The influenza virus can kill people, too."

If someone is feeling ill to the point of hospitalization, "we'll make sure you're looked after."

For more information, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or the York Region Public Health Department at 1-800-361-5653.

## Town employees quarantined

Seven Town of Markham employees have been quarantined as a precautionary measure.

The staffers have either visited Scarborough Grace Hospital where the first SARS cases were treated, or have been in close contact with someone tied to that facility.

A notice advising staff to seek medical attention if they feel ill has been circulated, said Glen Walker, manager of health and safety.

# Business supports budget

BY JEFF MITCHELL  
Staff Writer

Business is backing this week's provincial budget, which pledges tax cuts for corporations and individuals.

"They're certainly going in the right direction," Markham Board of Trade President Ruth Burkholder said.

"They're giving our businesses a break — and business certainly needs a break."

The budget, delivered Thursday by Finance Minister Janet Ecker at a Magna facility in Brampton, reduces tax rates for small business and cuts taxes on corporate capital gains. The budget also contains tax cuts for wage earners under the \$75,000 threshold, as well as seniors.

Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees said Friday morning the government is delivering on corporate tax cut promises to maintain a vital and viable atmosphere for business in Ontario.

"It's small and large business that create the jobs that allow people to have security," he said.

Vaughan-King-Aurora Liberal MPP Greg Sorbara slammed the Tories' dedication to tax cuts, saying investments in training and transportation infrastructure will go further toward fostering a healthy business atmosphere.

And he said the budget relies on unrealistic economic growth forecasts. "The government's numbers don't add up," he said.

"If we have an economic downturn in Ontario, this budget is an unmitigated disaster."

But Mr. Klees argued a strengthened bottom line will encourage growth among businesses and help Ontario's economy weather any upcoming recessionary trend.

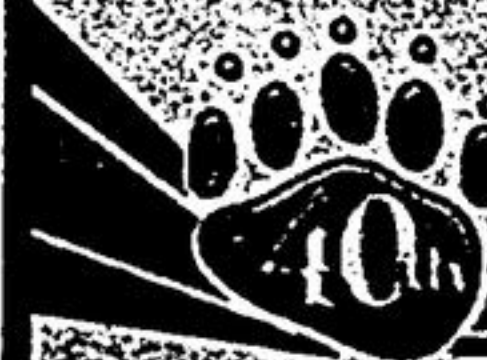
"Tax reduction and tax relief — particularly in these times — are important, because every dollar counts," he said.

Ms. Burkholder said savings resulting from tax relief would likely be reinvested in job creation. She cited an employment outlook survey recently conducted by Manpower Inc., which revealed 30 per cent of businesses polled intend to hire staff this spring.

"I would anticipate they would spend the money on hiring more workers," she said.

"Some of our businesses have been suffering with red tape and high taxes make it harder."

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