

Clean hands best infection control tactic

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

The first line of defence against infection is in your hands.

Quite literally, people can greatly enhance their protection against many viruses, bacteria and other nastiness by using hand sanitizer lotions and washing their hands well and often with warm water and soap.

That's conventional wisdom. But what of places such as hospitals and doctors' offices, where sick people are the common denominator?

The medical community employs stringent infection controls to protect patients and themselves.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons released the third edition of a comprehensive guide this month to help doctors thwart the transmission of infection.

"Our recent experience with SARS, as well as recent incidents arising from inadequate sterilization and disinfection of medical equipment, have underscored the notion that every person is vulnerable if proper safe-

guards are not in place to prevent transmission and acquisition of infection," said Dr. Anne Matlow, guide co-author and Hospital for Sick Children infection control director.

The guide is used to educate the medical community on current infection control practises, Dr. Matlow said.

The first thing patients see at Unionville family physician Rafik Bechbache's busy practice is a sign asking them to cleanse their hands with a sanitizer provided at the door.

"Hand washing is the most important thing patients can do," Dr. Bechbache said. "All of us on staff wash before and after seeing a patient. That helps ensure we don't catch anything and that we don't pass anything on."

When potentially infectious patients are expected, they kept away from other patients, Dr. Bechbache said.

"If we suspect chicken pox, for example, we'll make them the last appointment of the day and then thoroughly clean the examination room," he said. "We have

a strict cleaning protocol where a service disinfects our office everyday."

Medical gloves are also used during patient examinations, Dr. Bechbache said.

York Region's three hospitals adhere to infection control measures, a ramped-up initiative since the SARS scare.

Markham Stouffville Hospital meets all the guidelines of the Campbell Commission SARS Report and has added extra precautions, vice-president Janet Roberts said.

The hospital has introduced two negative pressure isolation rooms and a separate waiting room in the emergency department and has hired an additional infection control practitioner.

The hospital has also escalated new safety measures, infection control practitioner Susanne Parker said.

"The hospital has just gone live across both sites (including partner site Uxbridge Cottage Hospital) with safety engineered medical devices (that) reduce the risk of needlestick injuries to staff," she said.

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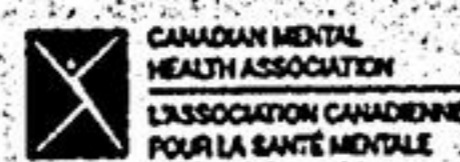
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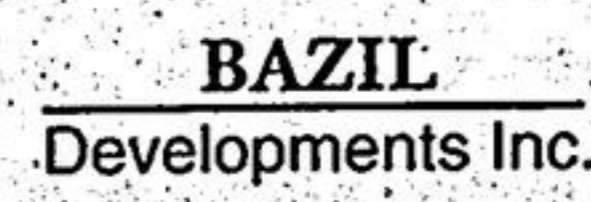
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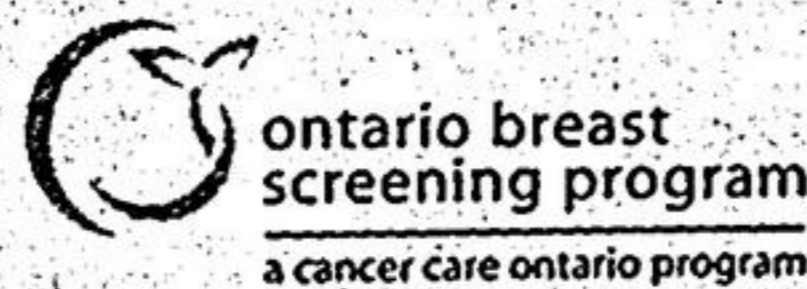
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