

PESKY FLU BUG STICKING AROUND INTO SPRING

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FLU FACTS

Achoo!!!
If you hear a lot of sneezing from your colleague in the next cubicle, you might want to pass them some hand sanitizer.

And try to make it alcohol-based.

The number of flu cases seems to be down in York Region this winter, said Grace Volkening, manager of infection prevention and control at Southlake Hospital.

But that doesn't mean we're out of the proverbial viral woods yet.

"Through November to March or April there's always a number of viruses circulating," she said.

That includes the common cold as well as a number of stomach viruses, Ms Volkening said.

To keep the spread of those viruses to a minimum, some common sense rules apply, she said.

Most viruses spread easily through contact with infected people, Ms Volkening said. Covering your face when you cough or sneeze — and washing your hands afterward — will help keep transmission to a minimum.

Keeping an alcohol-

Influenza is a respiratory infection caused by virus, the Public Health Agency of Canada reveals. Strains circulate each year and typically start with headache, chills and a cough. This is followed by:

- ▶ Loss of appetite;
- ▶ Muscle aches and fatigue;
- ▶ Runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes and throat irritation;
- ▶ Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur, especially in children.

based sanitizer nearby to wash your hands is convenient, she added.

"How many people are going to get up and down from their desks 50 times a day?" she said.

"Those (preventive) steps, collectively, will make a huge difference in terms of transmission."

Flu season usually sees lots of children staying home from school, Ms Volkening said, and hospitals and retirement

homes discourage employees from coming to work with fever or respiratory symptoms.

But whether that would work in the business world is another story.

"It's a good idea," she said. "But I don't know how you could enforce it without taking everyone's temperature at the door."

Although the season often sees an increase in respiratory illness, stomach flu — or gastroenteritis — seems to be more common this year, said Dr. David Austin, chief of the emergency medicine department at Markham Stouffville Hospital.

"I think everybody was geared up for it and getting the flu shot but flu cases, at least in the emergency department, aren't that prevalent," he said.

Washing your hands helps keep viruses at bay, Dr. Austin said. Also, not sharing objects that could easily become contaminated, such as drinking glasses or cutlery, can limit infections.

That can be tough with children who share toys without considering whether they're spreading flu or the common cold, Dr. Austin said.

"But adults can get it, too," he said.



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