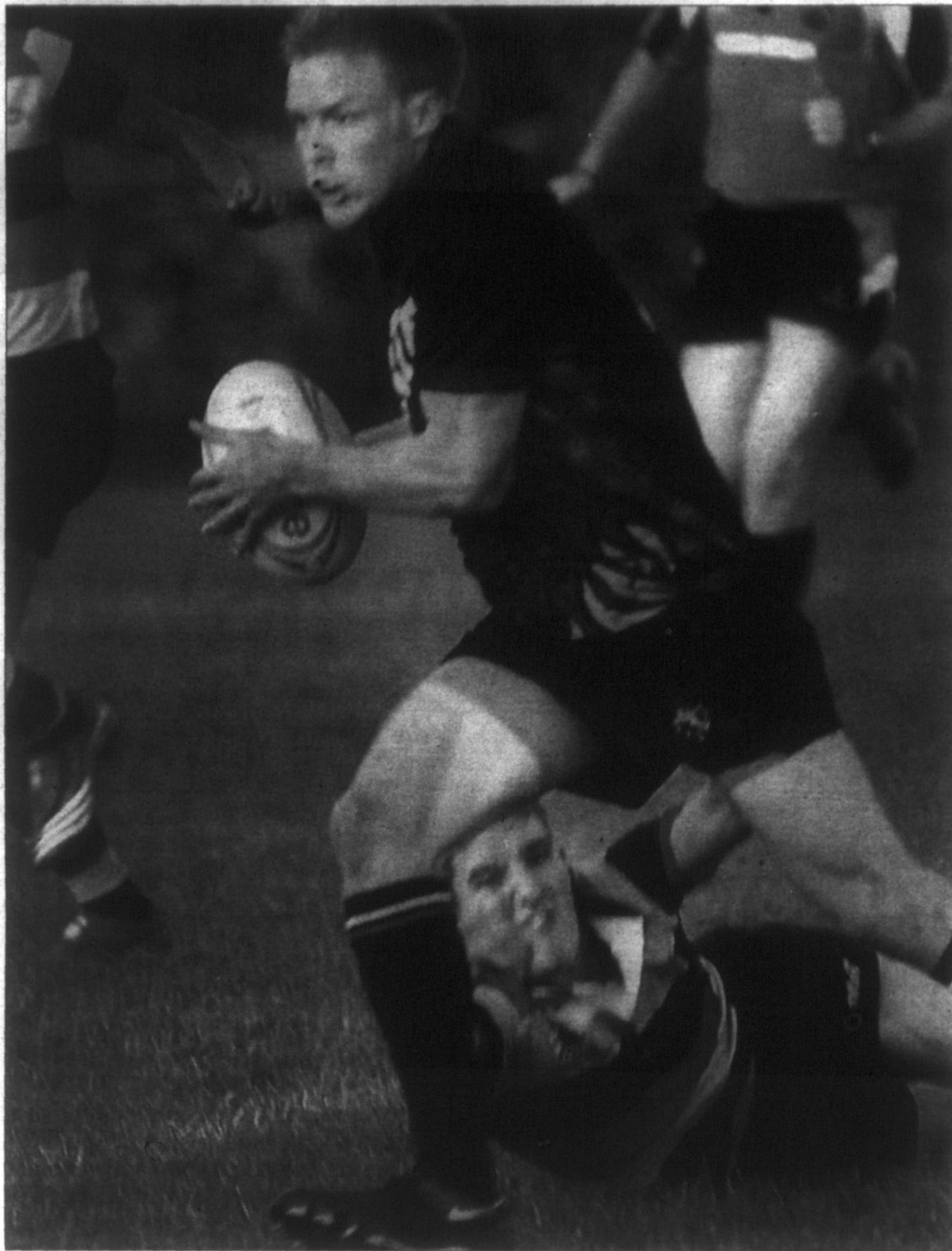


MANN UP



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Stouffville's Lawson Mann of the Markham Football Rugby Club's under-18's carries the ball past a Lindsay player during the Toronto Rugby Union final in Markham Wednesday. Mann passed to Connor Fitzsimmons for a try during Markham's 44-17 win.

H1N1 may lead to school staffing issues

Sick teachers should stay home: union

BY KIM ZARZOUR
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Pregnant teachers and other educators whose immune systems are compromised should not be in a classroom with a high risk of contracting swine flu, the head of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation says.

The teachers union is preparing for an outbreak of the H1N1 virus, Ken Coran told the federation's annual meeting Thursday.

With classrooms an ideal breeding ground for germs, teachers are at the frontline of the second wave of the virus expected to hit this fall. In a profession where more than 70 per cent are female, Mr. Coran said the fate of pregnant workers is a key concern.

"If they're pregnant and if there's a risk of H1N1 — if there was someone in their class or someone they come in contact with — we would want to put their personal interests as the No. 1 priority," Mr. Coran said at the union's summer leadership conference in Thornhill. "We would say, stay at home."

While pregnant women are no more likely to contract the virus than anyone else, medical officials say they are more likely to suffer complications, as are those with chronic lung, heart, kidney or liver disease, diabetes or asthma.

Two Quebec school boards have decided to keep pregnant teachers at home this fall because of the threat.

York Region's public and Catholic school boards have yet to take similar precautions.

With the start of the school year just days away, teachers are expressing concern in calls to his provincial head office, Mr. Coran said.

The union represents 60,000 public high school and occasional teachers and others, including educational assistants and continuing education teachers.

"We are reassuring them we have been working with the Ministry of Health to make sure that all precautions are taken," he said. "We would be foolish to think a pandemic is not a realistic possibility. We only have to

look at examples this summer of children's summer camps where the flu virus spread very quickly among hundreds of children."

Most school boards are gearing up for September with fresh supplies of hand sanitizers and other personal hygiene measures, he said.

However, if the preventive measures aren't effective, he said the union will take those in "exceptional circumstances", especially staff who are pregnant, very seriously.

Sick teachers will be asked to stay home until they are no longer contagious and the union will insist qualified occasional teachers be called in to replace them.

While pregnant women are no more likely to contract the virus than anyone else, medical officials say they are more likely to suffer complications, as are those with chronic lung, heart, kidney or liver disease, diabetes or asthma.

"We have very strong collective agreements," he said. "We believe there is a wealth of qualified personnel out there and those people should be contacted first."

But staff with York Region's separate school board say it's too early to say how it will deal with staffing challenges.

"We are actively working on it," board spokesperson Chris Cable said, adding the board is awaiting guidelines from the Ministry of Health. "Certainly, we've had lessons from SARS."

York Region public health, which works with both school boards on H1N1, is also taking its direction from the ministry and, so far, the province has not followed Quebec's lead with respect to pregnant teachers, according to the health unit's Monica Bryce.

But that could change, she said.

"Because this is a new virus, we're learning more and more about it as time goes on and we're going to maintain close contact with the school boards. It's going to be a very different flu season."

New ministry guidelines for school boards released Friday reinforce "flu etiquette" — hygiene and cleaning — and ask schools to report student absenteeism rates to local public health units weekly. Pregnant teachers and those with pre-existing chronic disease are advised to be especially cautious.

The public board's advice to pregnant teachers is no different from that to other staff — focus on prevention, self-protection measures such as staying away from large crowds and, if a pregnant worker does experience flu symptoms, seeing a doctor right away, spokesperson Ross Virgo said.

Studies show prompt treatment with anti-influenza drugs offers the best results.

The public board will also emphasize "passive screening" at schools. If staff notice students or co-workers with flu symptoms, they are expected to urge them to go home.

At this point, no one is anticipating school shut-downs. It's believed students would be better off in a setting where personal hygiene can be monitored, but that, too, could change "in light of emerging epidemiology", according to ministry guidelines released Friday.

There may be academic concerns in the case of widespread disruption of schools, especially for students preparing for university, Mr. Coran acknowledged.

Teachers will do all they can to ensure students master the material they need for their post-secondary options, he said.

"We're professionals. Our job is to educate the students. Part of educating students is to have a full realization of the impact of this pandemic," he said. "But we're certainly not going to short-change the students."



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STOUFFVILLE CLIPPERS Midget & Tyke Tryouts* for 2009-2010

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Cost \$10⁰⁰ / 1 hr; \$15⁰⁰ / 1.5 hrs; \$20⁰⁰/2hrs

TEAM	COACH	DATE	TIME	ARENA
TYKE C Born 2002/05	Steve Smith 905-642-6309 smith.sp@rogers.com	Sept 1	6:00 - 7:00PM	Pad A
		Sept 3	6:00 - 7:00PM	Pad A
		Sept 9	5:00 - 6:00PM	Pad A
TYKE B Born 2002/05	Justin Rogers 905-642-0645 justin19rogers@hotmail.com	Sept 1	6:00 - 7:00PM	Pad A
		Sept 3	6:00 - 7:00PM	Pad A
MIDGET A Born 1992/93	Joe Sutherland 905-640-7315 josephsutherland@rogers.com	Sept 1	9:30 - 11:00PM	Pad A
		Sept 2	7:30 - 9:00PM	Pad A
		Sept 8	9:00 - 11:00PM	Pad A
		Sept 12	7:00 - 9:00PM	Pad A
MIDGET AE Born 1992/93	Doug Wagg 905-640-5551 we4waggs@sympatico.ca	Sept 13	2:00 - 3:00PM	Pad A
		Sept 20	2:00 - 3:00PM	Pad A
Peewee Rostered Select Born 1997/98	Scott Paisley 905-888-9474 littlerougefarms@sympatico.ca	Sept 13	2:00 - 3:00PM	Pad A
		Sept 20	2:00 - 3:00PM	Pad A
		Sept 27	2:00 - 3:00PM	Pad A

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