

HALTON REGION PUBLIC HEALTH • Office of the Medical Officer of Health

TEL: 905-825-6000 • TOLL FREE: 1-866-442-5866 • FAX: 905-825-1444

TO: Halton Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Emergency Departments, other Healthcare Providers

FROM: Dr. Joanna Oda, Associate Medical Officer of Health

DATE: November 15, 2023

RE: Increased Influenza and COVID-19 Virus Activity in Halton

QUICK FACTS

- On November 10th, 2023, Halton reported its first Influenza A outbreak in a retirement home.
- Sporadic cases of Influenza A and B continue to be reported in Halton for the 2023-24 season.
- As of November 14th, there were fourteen active COVID-19 institutional outbreaks in Halton.
- Long Term Care and Retirement Homes in Halton were notified to ensure they have ready access to COVID-19 and influenza therapeutics, such as Paxlovid and Tamiflu (or Relenza).
- Residents of congregate living settings are at higher risk of severe disease, and antiviral treatments such as, Paxlovid and Tamiflu, are most effective when administered within 5 days and 2 days of symptom onset, respectively.
- Healthcare providers associated with these institutions, their residents or staff in Halton may be asked for assistance with providing antiviral prescriptions in the event of an outbreak.

KEY MESSAGES FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

- When Influenza is circulating in the community, treatment should begin as soon as possible for those with either suspected or confirmed influenza, as per [Antiviral Medications for the 2023-24 Seasonal Influenza: Public Health Considerations](#).
- Confirmation of COVID-19 via rapid antigen testing (RAT), nasopharyngeal PCR, or other molecular test, is required for initiation of COVID-19 antivirals (e.g., Paxlovid).
- For [Access to antiviral treatments for COVID-19 in the community](#), refer to Ontario Health for Clinical Resources and Education on the use of [COVID-19 Treatment](#) and [Patient handout: What you need to know about Paxlovid](#).
- Encourage the uptake of both influenza and COVID-19 vaccines, particularly for staff working in Long Term Care and Retirement Homes.
 - For Influenza vaccination information, please refer to [FOCUS ON Vaccines for the 2023-24 Influenza Season](#)
 - For COVID-19 vaccination information, please refer to [COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance, Ministry of Health](#)
- For information on the most recent epidemiology refer to:
 - [The Influenza Reporting Dashboard](#), and [COVID-19 Data in Halton: Interactive Dashboard](#) on [halton.ca](#), which continue to be updated weekly.
 - [Ontario's Respiratory Virus Tool](#) and [Canada's FluWatch](#) for provincial and national influenza surveillance.

- For outbreak management in institutions refer to:
 - [Control of Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Long-Term Care Homes](#) (2018, or as current)
 - [Ministry of Health Respiratory Infection Outbreaks in Institutions and Public Hospitals, 2023](#)
 - [COVID-19 Guidance for Public Health Units: Long-Term Care Homes, Retirement Homes, and Other Congregate Living Settings](#)

KEY MESSAGES FOR PATIENTS

- Residents and staff of congregate living settings (e.g., Long Term Care, retirement homes) are considered a high-risk group and should be prioritized for vaccination.
- Getting vaccinated and staying up to date with your COVID-19 and influenza vaccines is the best way to prevent severe outcomes, including hospitalization and death due to viral respiratory infections. It also serves to help prevent the spread of infection and keep the most vulnerable safe.
- Receive your [influenza vaccine as soon as possible](#), as it takes about two weeks to take effect.
- Individuals 6 months of age and older (without contraindications) can get their flu vaccine with the COVID-19 vaccine.
- The RSV vaccine has been approved for use in adults 60 years of age and older but is only publicly funded for residents of Long-Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes that are licensed to provide dementia care.
- Adults 60 years of age and older who are not eligible for a publicly funded dose of the RSV vaccine, may choose to purchase this vaccine privately through a pharmacy.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [2023/2024 Universal Influenza Immunization Program \(UIIP\), Ministry of Health](#)
- [Clinical Considerations for the Co-Administration of RSV, COVID-19 and Influenza Vaccines Among Older Adults in Long-Term Care Facilities](#)

Please report all suspected/confirmed cases of [Diseases of Public Health Significance](#) (only report COVID-19 cases occurring in high-risk settings) to Public Health immediately by calling 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866.

PLEASE PROVIDE A COPY TO ALL PHYSICIANS IN YOUR OFFICE AND/OR POST IN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS AND PHYSICIAN LOUNGES. IF YOU HAVE ANY ISSUES WITH THIS ATTACHMENT, PLEASE EMAIL DOCTORS@HALTON.CA.