



St. Joe's officials urge public to get flu shots

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January 11, 2011

The emergency room at St. Joseph's Health Centre continues to see an influx of flu-stricken patients through its doors since the holidays, and as a result, staff at the west end hospital are encouraging community members to protect themselves by getting the shot.

The vaccine is developed each year based on what prominent flu strains are circulating, according to Kathy Millar, vice-president of quality, safety and performance excellence at St. Joe's.

"We've certainly experienced through the holidays an increase in sick people through our ER and an increase in flu patients," she said. "A lot of patients are elderly. What we're trying to do is encourage people to wash their hands and get their flu shot."

Influenza A is the type of virus the hospital is treating, said Cheryl Croutch, acting manager for infection, prevention and control. Its symptoms include fever, muscle aches, joint pain, headache, sore throat and cough.

"Generally, you start with a headache first. It's as if you've walked into a wall. You know when you get it. It's quite debilitating and can lead to other illness," said Croutch.

There are several myths surrounding the flu shot, such as the flu shot causes you to become sick. This is in fact not true, assured Croutch.

"It's not a live virus vaccine," she said.

There's also the pain factor. Some people are afraid of needles.

The seasonal flu shot is available at doctors' offices, community health centres and walk-in medical clinics. Some employers also provide vaccination clinics in the workplace. St. Joe's flu shot clinic began at the end of October and it has since vaccinated more than 570 people. The body requires about two weeks to build up protection to the virus. Protection typically lasts four months or more. The flu vaccine is 70 to 90 per cent effective in healthy individuals, according to health officials. Those with the flu are contagious for one to two days before symptoms become apparent. Many people can have mild symptoms, which can be mistaken for the common cold.

"Propper hand washing is key to getting rid of germs," said Millar.

Further information about the flu shot and where you can get it can be found on St. Joe's website at www.stjoe.on.ca

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