



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **OHT-N partners issue call to action to preserve health care resources for those who need them most**

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Thursday, November 17, 2022** – Rates of respiratory illness, including [respiratory syncytial virus \(RSV\)](#) and [influenza](#) (flu), are on the rise in our region and throughout Ontario. Together with the ongoing presence of COVID-19, this is putting direct pressure on all areas of our health care system and particularly on primary care offices (family physician/nurse practitioner providers) as well as hospitals.

As colder weather arrives, and we gather more in interior spaces, the rates of these illnesses—and the corresponding demand on our already stretched health care system—will go up.

In an effort to blunt the impact of respiratory illness in our region and preserve already stretched resources for those who will need them the most, Ontario Health Team of Northumberland (OHT-N) partners are joining forces with an urgent Northumberland ‘call to action’ to help all—providers, caregivers and patients alike—manage what is shaping up to be a challenging few months ahead.

The OHT-N call to action has three simple goals:

- 1) Help raise awareness of the rising rates of respiratory illness in our community
- 2) Remind everyone of the steps we can take, as individuals, to minimize our risk of getting sick (and inadvertently spreading viruses to others) this season; and,
- 3) Promote additional resources available—beyond primary care offices and the nearest hospital—if we are sick or caring for someone who is sick.

### **Respiratory disease in Northumberland - What the data are telling us**

The Haliburton Kawartha Pine Ridge District Health Unit’s [Respiratory Diseases Dashboard](#) reports weekly updates each Tuesday on the local rates of respiratory illness, including COVID-19 and influenza. Of particular concern to Dr. Natalie Bocking, our region’s Medical Officer of Health and Health Unit CEO, is the sharp increase in visits to area emergency departments.

“Over the last week, hospital emergency departments in Northumberland County have had 242 visits for respiratory and influenza like illness. This is nearly twice the number of weekly visits that were recorded at the beginning of October,” notes Dr. Bocking. “This comes at a time when COVID is very much still with us, and poses a ‘triple threat’, as Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health has described it, we cannot ignore.”

For this and other high-level assessments of localized respiratory virus activity, see the full Dashboard on the Health Unit website [www.hkpr.on.ca](http://www.hkpr.on.ca).

## **Check to protect - Simple steps we can take now to minimize the chances of serious illness and community spread of respiratory illness:**

- ✓ Make sure you and your family members' COVID vaccinations are up to date, meaning you have completed your primary series and, for those 5 years of age and older, you have received a COVID-19 vaccine within the last six months of your last dose or infection. COVID-19 vaccinations can be booked locally through the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit [www.hkpr.on.ca/covid-19/vaccine-clinics/](http://www.hkpr.on.ca/covid-19/vaccine-clinics/) or call 1-833-943-3900. Many pharmacies and some primary care offices, including the Northumberland Family Health Team, [www.nfht.ca](http://www.nfht.ca), are also offering COVID vaccination. Learn more about vaccines and where to get vaccinated here: [www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-vaccines](http://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-vaccines)
- ✓ Get a flu shot. Flu shots are given to those aged 6 months and older. Learn more about where to get a flu shot in Northumberland County on the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit's website: [www.hkpr.on.ca/2019/10/23/flu-vaccine/](http://www.hkpr.on.ca/2019/10/23/flu-vaccine/).
- ✓ Wear a mask when indoors in crowded public spaces and physical distancing cannot be maintained – masking is not currently mandatory in most areas of Northumberland County beyond high-risk health settings, like hospitals and long-term care settings, where special guidelines remain in force, but it is a small gesture that is known to have a big impact on stopping the spread of germs. Surgical masks should be properly worn, covering the nose and mouth.
- ✓ Screen for respiratory symptoms daily and stay home if you are ill. What feels like a minor cold to you could be serious if transmitted to someone else.
- ✓ Wash your hands, often, particularly when out in public. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth unless you have just washed your hands.

## **What to do if you catch a respiratory illness, or if you are a care provider for someone who is sick**

**Mild symptoms?** Most of us with respiratory symptoms—whether from flu, COVID, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), or other respiratory infections—will recover on our own and will not require prescription medications. Self-isolate and rest, drink plenty of fluids and take over-the-counter medicines such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen as able and as needed and directed on the manufacturer's instructions for fever or muscle aches.

**Child with a fever?** The attached information sheet, *Information for families and caregivers on children's fever and pain medication*, is a combined effort between the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Canadian Pharmacists Association and four Canadian children's hospitals. It contains helpful information on fevers and the use of over-the-counter medication. [Find it online here.](#)

**When to see a doctor or Nurse Practitioner?** There are special considerations for respiratory illness in children. The attached information sheet, *Family Doctor Tips on Caring for Children with Respiratory Symptoms*, is an excellent resource for answering many common questions, including when to call the doctor or NP's office. [Find it online here](#). A virtual appointment may be offered in some instances. This is one way primary care providers can determine if you need to be seen in person.

**When to call 911 or go to the emergency department?** Emergency departments (EDs) are very busy places but, in some circumstances, the ED is the only option available for accessing urgent care quickly. Some examples of when you should call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department: if you are worried that you or someone you are caring for is seriously ill; if your infant, younger than three months old, has a fever; if your child is struggling to breathe or is breathing faster than normal; if you are concerned about the risk of dehydration.

The best gift we can all give to one another and all health care providers this holiday season is to ensure we take action, where it is in our control, to minimize the risk of contracting a respiratory illness. Prevention, and response, is a shared responsibility. For the sake of the most vulnerable among us—the very young, older individuals, and those whose health is already challenged by chronic health conditions, precarious housing situations or both—we must each continue to do everything in our power to protect our whole community by preserving health care resources for those who need them most. Thank you, Northumberland, for everything you have done to date. We are, still, stronger together.

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Find this and more information on the OHT-N website, [OHTNorthumberland.ca](http://OHTNorthumberland.ca).

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