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RVH responds to high volumes in Emergency department

As the incidence of influenza increases in North Simcoe Muskoka, Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre continues to experience high numbers of admitted patients and high acuity in its Emergency department (ED).

“An increase in Emergency department visits is typical in the winter, particularly during the holidays when physician offices and walk-in clinics may be closed. We plan for that kind of surge,” says RVH’s Chief of Staff Dr. Jeffrey Tyberg. “However since Christmas, we continue to see a sustained spike in volumes. Some of the activity is due to respiratory illness, including influenza, and many of these patients are sick enough to be admitted to hospital.”

Currently every bed in the health centre is full with the occupancy rate over 120 per cent. RVH has brought in additional staff and temporarily opened unfunded beds throughout the facility, including a “surge unit” to care for patients waiting for an inpatient bed to become available. Meanwhile, the occupancy situation is monitored continuously. RVH has not had to cancel elective surgeries or outpatient clinics.

Hospitals throughout Ontario are experiencing similar volumes and hospitals throughout North Simcoe Muskoka are working closely together on a regional surge plan to ensure patients are safely repatriated to their home hospitals as soon as possible.

The increased volumes, and the ongoing challenge to place patients on inpatient units, means ED wait times are longer than usual. If your health condition is not urgent, patients should consider other options before going to the ED, including a visit to your family doctor, nurse practitioner or a walk-in clinic. If you are unsure if a trip to the ED is required, you can call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0007.

“Some people – including infants and the elderly – are at a higher risk of developing complications from the flu,” says Dr. Tyberg. “So patients with severe flu-like symptoms, or any other type of urgent condition, should go to the emergency department for care. If you have mild symptoms, you can safely recuperate at home with lots of rest and fluids. Patients with moderate flu symptoms can visit their family doctor or walk-in clinic.”

There are five walk-in clinics in Barrie. The Barrie Family Medicine Clinics are located at 125 Bell Farm Road, 555 Essa Road, 121 Wellington St. and 829 Big Bay Point Road. The hours of operation can be found online or by calling 705-726-1544. The Huronia Urgent Care Clinic is located at 480 Huronia Road and can be reached at 705-792-0933.

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit predicts influenza activity will peak in one to four weeks, so there is still time to get a flu shot, which will also protect against a potential second wave of flu that often comes between February and April.

“It’s important for people to get the flu shot,” Dr. Colin Lee, associate medical officer of health said. “We know that this year’s circulating strain will cause more severe illness than last year’s strain, especially among elderly people and those with medical conditions. People who have been immunized will also be helping to prevent the flu from spreading to those vulnerable people.”

The flu vaccine is available through most local pharmacies and healthcare providers. To find the nearest pharmacy giving the flu shot, visit the website www.ontario.ca/flu.

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About RVH:

RVH is a regional health centre in Barrie, Ontario, located 80 kilometres north of Toronto. As the largest hospital in the region of Simcoe Muskoka, RVH’s team of over 350 physicians, 2,500 employees and 850 volunteers provides exceptional care and specialty services to almost half a million residents, including cancer care, stroke services, orthopaedics, intensive care, mental health and interventional radiology. RVH is focused on delivering high-quality, safe care that puts patients and their families first. For more information visit www.rvh.on.ca