

2007/08 Influenza Season has begun in Toronto

Since the start of the 2007/08 influenza season, Toronto Public Health (TPH) has received four laboratory confirmed reports of Influenza A. Two cases were part of an outbreak in a long-term care home. None of these cases appear to be travel-related.

You have likely heard some of the media reports stating that this year's flu vaccine may not work as well as usual. These reports have been based on WHO surveillance data that have shown that some of the strains circulating between May and September of this year have mutated somewhat from those that are in this year's vaccine (A/Solomon Islands, A/Wisconsin and B/Malaysia).

The strain confirmed thus far in Toronto by the National Microbiology Laboratories is A/Wisconsin/67/05-like (H3N2), which is included in this year's vaccine. There has also been confirmation of an Influenza B strain antigenically characterized as B/Florida/07/04-like from a neighbouring jurisdiction. This strain is not included in this year's vaccine.

At this point in time, it is difficult to predict which influenza virus strain will predominate and the severity of influenza-related disease activity for this flu season. Even in years where there is not an exact match between circulating and vaccine viral strains, the vaccine can still afford up to 60% protection in healthy adults. **Therefore, vaccination is still the best means of protection against influenza and influenza-related complications.** For a list of TPH flu vaccination clinics please visit <http://www.toronto.ca/health/flu/index.htm>.

Given the non-specific symptoms of influenza infection (e.g. typically fever, headache, chills, muscles aches, exhaustion, cough, sore throat, stuffy or runny nose), laboratory confirmation of the virus is necessary to ensure an accurate diagnosis.

To track seasonal influenza trends and reports, please visit our website for the Toronto Weekly Influenza Bulletin at http://www.toronto.ca/health/cdc/communicable_disease_surveillance/statistics_and_reports/weekly_influenza_news/index.htm

Cases of influenza infection should be reported to Toronto Public Health by calling our surveillance reporting line at 416-392-7411 (or 416-690-2142, after hours) within one working day. Any suspect outbreaks of respiratory infections in institutions are immediately reportable.