

Swine Flu: Are You Ready?

By Jane Barry

The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

If you have visited a public washroom lately it's hard not to notice the posters and attention being given to the simple, but important hygienic routine of hand-washing that can make a significant difference to our health and help prevent the spread of illnesses. One of them is Swine Flu, the H1N1 virus. For the public, there may be other unanswered questions about the malady.



The Greater Saint John Community Foundation aims to fill that void by organizing a public session called "Swine Flu: Are You Ready?" Tuesday Sept. 29th, 12 noon at the Saint John Free Public Library's Multi-Purpose Room in Market Square. It is offered as a public service by the Community Foundation to those who wish to take their noontime lunch hour, bring a brown bag and learn at the same time. "We are pleased to host this important information sharing event!" says Joann Hamilton Barry, Regional Librarian.

(Photo: The Greater Saint John Community Foundation is organizing a public session on "Swine Flu: Are You Ready?", Tuesday Sept. 29th, 12 noon at the Saint John Free Public Library as a public service. Dr. Stephen Willis, family physician, pictured giving Bonnie Campbell a regular flu vaccination, will be one of the speakers.)

Dr. Scott Giffin, District Medical Health Officer, Dr. Stephen Willis, family physician, and Tim Kelly of Workplace Health Outcomes will be the featured speakers. Each will discuss H1N1 from different perspectives: public health, family medicine and in the workplace. They will be available to answer questions at the end of the hour-long session.

"Public health experts warn that we are overdue for an influenza (flu) pandemic. A pandemic is a disease outbreak that spreads worldwide. This happens when a new disease appears that spreads easily from person to person. The question is not if it will happen, but when and how serious it will be. Experts urge everyone to take steps now to plan and prepare." states the Canadian Public Health Association.

They are:

1. Cover your sneeze or cough with your sleeve
2. Wash your hands
3. Try not to touch your nose, mouth and eyes
4. Get the flu shot every fall
5. Stay home if you're sick with the flu

When you catch the flu it is sudden and severe. It begins with a headache, chills and cough followed by a high fever, muscle aches, loss of appetite and fatigue, lasting up to two weeks. There is no cure except rest at home, drinking lots of fluids and treating the fever and aches to help your body fight the virus.

A vaccine is any preparation intended to produce immunity to a disease by stimulating the production of antibodies. Vaccines are the primary means to prevent illness and death from influenza. It is unlikely that the seasonal flu shot will provide protection against H1N1 Flu Virus. Antivirals are drugs used for the prevention and early treatment of influenza. PHAC (Public Health Agency of Canada) is not recommending that antivirals be given for a mild disease or on a preventive basis at this time. Dr. Stephen Willis explains that patients can obtain a regular flu vaccination but that Swine Flu vaccinations will be administered differently. As a general rule, PHAC estimates that usually less than 50 per cent of the population will choose to be immunized. The Government of Canada is confident that the 50.4 million pandemic vaccine doses they have ordered (50 per cent more than we would expect to use for a normal seasonal vaccination campaign) will be sufficient to meet the needs of every Canadian likely to need and want protection.

Plans are underway at the provincial level to determine how the most vulnerable groups, pregnant women, people with underlying medical conditions such as diabetes, those with compromised immune systems, the chronically ill and very young children will be served and how others can access the service. In the meantime, workplaces, homes and individuals can inform and prepare themselves and take precautions which are practical and make sense whether or not the full force of the flu takes hold later this fall and winter or not. "15% of doing a Pandemic Plan is Medical and the other 85% of doing the plan is Non-Medical. There is a lot companies can do on their own to protect themselves" states Tim Kelly.

Dr. Scott Giffin points out that Public Health has designated October the month for annual flu vaccinations and November will be designated the month for focusing on swine flu, the H1N1 virus.

For information:

www.pandemic.cpha.ca 1-800-454-8302

www.fightflu.ca

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/alert-alerte/h1n1

Health Canada www.hc-sc.gc.ca



Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880. To view other Community Profiles go to www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca