

Flu Cases Surging; Kids And Young Adults Vulnerable To New Strain Say Doctors

TORONTO: Cases of influenza are continuing to ramp up across the country, with kids and teens bearing much of the brunt of the dreaded winter bug, say infectious diseases experts, predicting that the peak of the annual sneezing-coughing-feeling-miserable season is due to arrive soon.

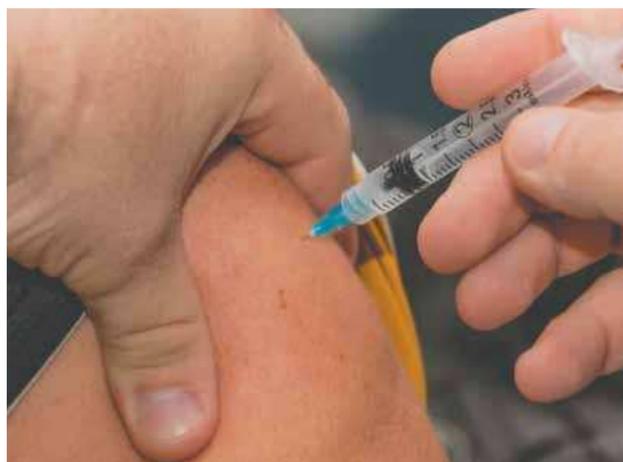
This year's flu season has a far different profile than last year's: it began earlier and the predominant circulating A strain is H1N1, the viral type that caused the pandemic in 2009-2010 but hasn't made much of an appearance for the last few years.

Those previous seasons were dominated by H3N2, an influenza A strain that is particularly hard on older adults and which typically carries a higher risk of complications like pneumonia that can lead to hospitalization or death, said Dr. Danuta Skowronski, epidemiology lead of influenza and emerging respiratory pathogens at the BC Centre for Disease Control.

In contrast, H1N1 tends to target children and younger adults more than seniors. "This year in particular, we have expected that children under nine years of age and non-elderly adults will be disproportionately affected ... children because they are less likely to have protection (built-in immunity) from prior epidemics of H1N1."

Indeed, the BCCDC's surveillance of lab-confirmed cases of flu show that about one-third of all H1N1 detections so far this season have been in children nine years of age or younger, even though kids in that age range make up just 10 per cent of the province's population.

While H1N1-predominant sea-



sons tend to be milder overall compared to those characterized primarily by H3N2, individuals who get hit with either strain won't detect much of a difference — both bring on fever, cough, general malaise and achy muscles and joints, she said.

As of Dec. 29, the most recent data available from the Public Health Agency of Canada shows there were 13,796 laboratory-confirmed influenza cases across the country, with the provinces and territories reporting 1,046 hospitalizations and 24 deaths. Most cases occurred in people under age 65.

Last season at that point, 11,275 cases of lab-confirmed flu had been reported.

Since September, PHAC says 414 children under age 16 have been hospitalized for flu, with the highest estimated rate of admission among kids under five years of age. That's more than double the 195 logged during the same period in 2017. Seventy-one of those kids had to be admitted to the ICU. At least one death has been documented by the network

of 12 pediatric hospitals across the country that reports to PHAC.

However, these figures reflect only cases in which testing was performed; many more people who come down with the flu don't seek medical assistance and therefore aren't tested.

"We're really just now getting into our flu season," said Dr. Michelle Murti of Public Health Ontario, noting that the proportion of tests on people with respiratory bugs that came back positive for influenza had doubled to 16 per cent in the week ending Dec. 29, compared to eight per cent the week before. "So we're probably on track to coming up to more of our peak activity in the next couple of weeks or so."

Dr. Jennifer Russell, chief medical officer of health for New Brunswick, said: "...people should get the flu shot. It's the best protection that we have to give people against the flu," said Russell, adding that children and adolescents, adults with underlying lung or heart conditions and the elderly should make sure they are immunized.

Sharp Fall In Sales Of Luxury Homes Seen In Major Canadian Cities

TORONTO: Sales of luxury properties declined sharply in three of Canada's biggest cities last year as homebuyers retreated amid tightened mortgage guidelines and higher interest rates.

A report released today found that Vancouver, Toronto and Calgary saw large drops in high-end real estate sales in 2018 as the markets dealt with a number of headwinds including tighter supply, higher foreign buyer taxes and strained economic conditions due to the falling price of oil.

Sotheby's International Realty Canada says the number of homes that were sold last year for \$1 million and higher, dropped 26 per cent in Vancouver while home sales priced \$4 million and more fell 49 per cent year-over-year.

In Calgary, sales of homes priced at \$1 million or more fell 10 per cent in 2018, compared with a year ago, as crude oil prices plunged in the last quarter of the year. Only one home sold for more than \$4 million in that city in 2018.

In the Greater Toronto area, sales of homes worth \$1 million and more fell 31 per cent, while sales of homes over \$4 million and more dropped 40 per cent.

The report, which examined the high-end housing market in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto and Montreal, pointed out that Quebec's largest city was an anomaly even though there are signs that sales momentum is beginning to plateau.

Move To Reduce Auto Insurance Premiums

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drivers simply based on where they live

- Creating a regulatory framework that allows for a more modern auto insurance sector, including electronic communications, and electronic proof of auto insurance

- Moving toward full electronic commerce, similar to what is already provided by other financial institutions today, including banks and credit unions.

"Lower auto insurance rates mean we can put more money back into the pockets of taxpayers. The Ontario Government, working for the people, is keeping its promise to put drivers first by seeking their input, finding greater efficiencies and introduc-

ing more innovation in the system," Minister Fedeli added.

- There are nearly 10 million drivers across the province.

- Drivers are required by law to have auto insurance coverage, and have the right to fair treatment by their insurer, including timely handling of claims and the ability to file a complaint if necessary.

- The Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario will be a new, flexible and responsive independent financial regulator

A report commissioned by the previous Liberal government found in 2016 that Ontario had the most expensive auto insurance premiums in Canada despite also having one of the lowest levels of accidents and fatalities.




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