**January 9, 2018**

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MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

***Flu Season***

**(Strathroy, ON) –** The London Middlesex Health Unit has reported that this year’s flu season has begun with many cases being reported and confirmed in our surrounding communities. The flu, a virus (germ), causes about 12,200 hospitalizations and 3500 deaths in Canada each year.

People who are sick with the flu generally have a cough or sneeze and with these symptoms you can easily pass the germs on to others. When these flu germs spread they have the ability to travel up to 2 metres or 6 feet because they are carried by mucous. You can also catch the flu if you touch a surface that has flu germs on it and then touch your eyes or mouth.  People who are sick with the flu may have symptoms such as a fever, cough, body aches, vomiting, headaches, and sore throat. Seniors and young children are at greater risk of catching the flu virus.

Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) Emergency Departments in Strathroy and Newbury are seeing an increase in the number of patients with flu symptoms including fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle and body aches, headache and fatigue. Therefore MHA is asking for the public’s assistance in preventing the spread of the flu. You can do this by remembering to wash your hands often, cover your coughs and sneezes, clean surfaces and items that are touched often and get a flu shot every year. The flu shot is still available at pharmacies and doctor’s offices throughout the community. Everyone, and especially seniors, is encouraged to get the vaccine if they haven’t already done so.

Anyone not feeling well due to mild flu symptoms should be mindful of this and stay away from public areas or visiting others who are sick. This will avoid the risk of passing the flu on to patients with weakened immune systems.

Another resource available 24/7 is Telehealth Ontario. Those looking for health advice or information can call 1-866-797-0000 and speak to a Registered Nurse.

Patients visiting the Emergency Department are asked to remember to bring their OHIP card or other medical insurance information along with a list or supply of current medications. If your condition worsens while waiting in the department please notify a staff member immediately.

As with every emergency visit, no matter what time of year, patients will be seen by a doctor based on the severity of their illness or injury. Those with flu like symptoms will be asked to wear a mask to avoid spreading the infection to others.

Dr. Jon Dreyer, MHA Deputy Chief of Staff, would like to remind everyone to be patient when coming to the Emergency Department because volumes will be high and our ability to see patients in a timely manner, except for those who are critically ill, is likely to be challenged. However, patients will continue to receive the best possible care.

The following websites are available for specific information including:

* The latest FluWatch report, issued by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), available at <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fluwatch/>.

* Free flu shot clinics near you on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s “Get the flu shot” web page at<https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-flu-shot>

About MHA:

The Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) is comprised of two fully-accredited partner sites: Four Counties Health Services and Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital.

A progressive, team-oriented and technologically adept organization of excellence, the MHA is creating a more integrated and seamless approach to treatment by embracing and seeking out partnerships, through collaboration and investing in people. This coordinated approach helps to ensure that a high level of service is provided while reducing costs and continually enhancing quality.

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