

Planning ahead for a safe, healthy holiday season - Six tips for a health start to winter

With the daily number of new cases of COVID-19 on the rise in Ontario, and a sharp increase in the proportion of those cases confirmed to be the highly transmissible Omicron variant, the race toward vaccination is speeding up just as the cold weather and the holiday season (bringing family and social groups together indoors) is also taking off.

All eligible Ontarians are strongly encouraged to book vaccine appointments as soon as possible, especially those who have not yet received a first or second dose. In an announcement last week, Ontario confirmed that, starting December 13, individuals aged 50 and over are now eligible to schedule their booster dose appointment. Expanded booster dose eligibility for all Ontarians 18 and older will begin January 4, with appointments to be booked approximately six months after receiving a second dose.

It has been almost two years since the global pandemic was declared and we have learned a great deal about the virus in that time. "As we head into the holiday season, it is critically important that we each continue to do all we can to minimize the risk of COVID-19 taking hold in our community and our homes," said Susan Walsh, NHH President and CEO.

Below are six tips we can all take for a healthy start to winter. "As we have been from the start of this journey, we are truly in this together," said Walsh. "NHH will be here for you should you need us."

- Get vaccinated as soon as you are eligible** – To book a COVID-19 vaccine appointment for yourself or a loved one, change an existing appointment, or download a copy of your vaccine certificate visit Ontario.ca/bookvaccine or call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900. Updates on local vaccine clinic information will also be found on the local Health Unit website at hkpr.on.ca/2021/09/01/vaccination-clinics/. Families with questions about the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine for children can reach out virtually to the COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service at Sick Kids hospital, or call the team at 437-881-3505.
- Follow the advice of Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and our local medical officer of health** – Pay attention to appropriate masking practices and keep the size and number of social and holiday gatherings small. Additional precautions should be taken if all individuals are not fully vaccinated or where vaccination status is unknown.
- Stay home from work, school and public events if you are sick and get tested if you have COVID-19 symptoms** – NHH's COVID-19 Assessment Centre is open daily (with the exception of statutory holidays) for pre-scheduled appointments between 8AM to 4PM, at 1000 DePalma Drive, in the trailer immediately outside the Emergency Department. Call **905-377-7783 to book**.
- Get your flu shot** – Recommended for those six months of age and older, the flu vaccine is available from family physician offices, community health centres, walk-in clinics and pharmacies. For a full list of pharmacies offering flu vaccination clinics in the area, plus answers to frequently asked questions about the vaccine, see the local Health Unit website.
- Pay attention to your doctor/nurse practitioner's holiday hours and plan ahead when possible to avoid unnecessary trips to the Emergency Department** – Local primary care offices will have reduced hours of operation over the holiday season. Now, in advance of these closures, is the time to check to see when your doctor or nurse practitioner will be available and to confirm your family's prescriptions are up-to-date so you can minimize non-urgent trips to the ED.
- Consider Emergency Department alternatives** - NHH's Emergency Department is always ready when you need it, but the team recommends considering area primary care offices or community clinics for non-emergency health concerns. Many local family physicians operate after-hour clinics, accessible to their patients only. Check to see if your primary care provider has an after-hour service in place. If your situation is non-urgent, your primary care provider isn't available, or you have no primary care provider you can also get free telephone access to a Registered Nurse 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through the **Telehealth Ontario** service at 1-866-797-0000 (TTY 1-866-797-0007).

Best wishes to all for a safe, happy and healthy holiday season. We are all looking forward to the new year and, hopefully, 2023 is the year we can all, finally, put this pandemic behind us.

Single, unified digital health record for hospital patients across the Central East



Congratulations to NHH's dedicated staff, physicians and volunteers on successfully launching Epic, our new clinical information system (CIS). After many years of preparation, NHH joined with six partner hospital organizations across the Central East region on December 3 to transform the way health care is delivered. Visit nhh.ca to learn more about what this means for you, our community and the Central East hospital network. The new CIS is one of three key campaign priorities NHH Foundation will be raising funds for in their upcoming capital campaign. Visit nhhfoundation.ca to learn more about the role our community plays in supporting this and other equipment and technology priorities at NHH.

Flowers of thanks



Gratitude to NHH was paid forward this week in a unique way by the family and friends of a former patient who passed away last month. Before her life was cut short by non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, **Cathy Graham** was a respected Registered Nurse and teacher. Her patient journey took her through many areas of NHH, including Cancer and Supportive Care, Intensive Care and, finally, Palliative Care. Her family and friends wanted to honour Cathy's memory by bringing some joy to NHH patients and staff during the holiday season and, with help from Dahlia May Flower Farm of Trenton, worked with the hospital to coordinate delivery of 200 individually potted plants to every patient room and nursing station at NHH. Shown (L-R) are Rhonda (Ellanne's mother in-law), Ellanne (Cathy's daughter), Michael (son) and Nikki (daughter in-law). Their message to NHH: "Thank you to all for the exceptional care."