

Regional council updated on measles issue

By Bill Rea

The recent cases of measles reported in Ontario, including Peel Region, is a cause for concern, but not alarm.

That was the message Peel Health officials had for Regional councillors last week.

Medical Officer of Health Dr. David Mowat addressed councillors, accompanied by Associate Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eileen de Villa.

De Villa said there was notification of a measles exposure at Sky Zone Indoor Trampoline Park in Mississauga March 29 from a person not living in the region. Health department staff worked to make people who had been at the facility aware of what they could do to minimize risks. She added there was confirmation received April 4 of a Brampton infant who had recently been in a measles endemic country. There were several exposure sites in Peel and more than 600 potential contacts that required notification. She added the department has taken a number of actions, including public notification and contacting people who might have been exposed. People who might have been exposed have also been urged to contact their doctors to check their immunization records. Staff from Peel Public Health have also been assisting with the notification process.

Mowat agreed the number of recent cases of measles has been unusual.

He said Canada has been free of endemic measles since 1998.

Despite that, he said it's still a leading cause of death among young children globally. That is in spite of the availability of a safe and effective vaccine. Mowat observed that in 2012, 122,000 people around the world died of the disease. A lot of those were in the Third World where malnutrition would be common, but not all. Mowat said there were recently 23 deaths in the Philippines. Between 2009 and 2012, there were 27 cases of Measles reported in Canada. Mowat said most of those involved travel outside Canada and inadequate immunization.

He also said there had been 12 cases reported in Ontario up to that point this year.

“Measles is just about the most contagious disease there is,” Mowat remarked. “It's very, very infectious indeed.”

He said it spreads through coughing and sneezing, adding people who had not had two doses of vaccine or who never had the disease before are at risk.

He also stated that measles is contagious until four days after the red rash first appears, and it could take up to 21 days after exposure for symptoms to appear.

Symptoms can include high fever, cough and runny nose, sore eyes or sensitivity to light, small spots with a white centre inside the mouth and a red rash lasting four to seven days.

“Measles is now a rare disease,” Mowat said, adding it can be hard to diagnose because there are so many other rashes out there.

De Villa said two doses of vaccine are recommended for people born after 1970 (those born before are considered immune).

Vaccination of children is now part of the regular routine publicly funded schedule. The current vaccination rate for children in Peel is at about 96 per cent.

Mississauga Councillor Bonnie Crombie raised the issue of parents not getting their kids immunized.

“That has never been a big issue in the Region of Peel,” Mowat replied.

He added children in schools have to be immunized unless there is evidence of a conscientious objection or medical reason why they can't. Those numbers, he added, are “extremely low.”

He added there are many immigrants in Peel who have seen children sick and dying in hospitals, so a lot of them understand the benefits of vaccination.