



NEWS RELEASE

from Halton Healthcare Services

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Halton Healthcare Services tracks an increase in *C. difficile* infection rates at OTMH

A comprehensive infection control monitoring and surveillance program at Halton Healthcare Services (HHS) has identified an increase in *C. difficile* infections acquired by patients at Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital (OTMH). This recent information has prompted HHS to provide an update to its community.

“The health and safety of our patients is very important to us,” said John Oliver, HHS President & CEO. “We felt that it was important to inform the public of this sudden change in our patient care environment and to reassure them that we are taking proactive measures on a number of fronts to reduce the occurrence of this infection.”

The HHS Infection Prevention and Control Service is working closely with Halton Region Public Health to implement solutions. “While the precise causes of the increased incidence remain uncertain there are a number of contributing factors,” explains Dr. Neil Rau, Infectious Diseases Specialist, Medical Microbiologist and Medical Director, Infection Prevention and Control Service at HHS.

Dr. Rau cites the following as contributing factors:

- a seasonal and holiday period-related increase in the number of admissions
- a greater use of antibiotics during the current “pneumonia season”
- a lack of single patient rooms to care for symptomatic patients
- prolonged stays in the Emergency Room
- a high prevalence of CDI cases (both hospital and community acquired)

“We have always had strict infection control protocols that follow the most current best practice guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC),” continues Dr. Rau. “Over the past several years HHS has progressively implemented additional infection prevention measures, including an antibiotic stewardship program, to help reduce the risk of infection throughout its three community hospitals. In response to this most recent increase in cases a number of additional interventions are being implemented at OTMH.

This includes enhanced cleaning with Clorox®, daily team meetings and increased communication to our community.”

“*C. difficile* may be a commensal bacterium found in the large intestine of some people. It is usually kept in check by the normal or ‘good’ bacteria also living in the intestine,” said Dr. Rau. “Problems arise when antibiotics taken for other illnesses kill the ‘good’ bacteria which in turn allows the *C.difficile* bacteria to grow out of control and produce a damaging toxin. The bacterium, which contaminates the hospital environment, is picked up from surfaces and ingested. This is why hand hygiene on the part of everyone, in addition to diligent surface cleaning practices, are essential.”

Unchecked, *C.difficile* produces an excess amount of toxins which can damage the intestinal tract. Its usual symptoms include diarrhea, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal pain and swelling. Healthy people are not usually vulnerable to *C. difficile*. Seniors – and people who have other illnesses or conditions being treated with antibiotics and certain other stomach medications – are at greater risk of infection.

“We are continuing to reinforce existing infection control practices and implementing new strategies that will assist in protecting our patients,” said Dr. Rau. “*C. difficile* is not new to health care facilities and HHS has experienced increases in the past which have successfully been contained. However, this sudden increase in cases is concerning and warrants special actions. It goes without saying that good hand hygiene by physicians, staff, volunteers and visitors also remains a top priority to prevent *C. difficile* transmission.”

For more information, please contact
Trish Carlton
Director, Public Relations
Halton Healthcare Services
905-338-4668