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MIDDLESEX-LONDON ASSOCIATE MEDICAL OFFICER TO ASSIST WITH RUBELLA OUTBREAK

Local health officials continue to work with community to stop further spread

TORONTO – Dr. Sheela Basrur, Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, today announced the appointment of Dr. Bryna Warshawsky, under Section 86 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act, as Associate Medical Officer of Health of the County of Oxford Health Unit. This announcement was made as part of Dr. Basrur’s visit with the staff of the County of Oxford Public Health Unit and local community leaders to discuss ongoing measures to contain the rubella outbreak in southwestern Ontario.

Dr. Warshawsky, the current Associate Medical Officer of Health for Middlesex-London, will assist Dr. Doug Sider in the monitoring of the situation.

“The risk of contracting rubella for the general population remains low. If you have been immunized, we encourage you to go about your daily lives,” said Basrur. “If you are not immunized, please get vaccinated and help us protect your community.”

Most people born before 1957 are likely immune as a result of past exposure to rubella. Most children are also immune – 95 per cent of school children in Ontario have already been vaccinated. The measles, mumps, rubella vaccination is part of the routine vaccinations available free to all children in the province.

“This outbreak is occurring among a small population of unimmunized individuals,” said Sider. “This pattern we are seeing is not uncommon for this type of outbreak.”

Public health nurses and public health inspectors from neighbouring health units have joined staff at the County of Oxford Public Health Unit to ensure rubella cases and their close contacts are identified and monitored.

Rubella symptoms include a mild rash, low-grade fever and swollen glands. This is a relatively mild illness for children. However, rubella in an unimmunized pregnant woman – especially during the first 11 weeks of pregnancy – may cause infection in the fetus, leading to birth defects, fetal death or miscarriage.

Dr. Basrur urged all women who are contemplating pregnancy to ensure they have been immunized against rubella. Pregnant women who believe they may have been exposed to a person with rubella symptoms should seek medical advice. The rubella vaccine cannot be given to pregnant women.

Rubella is highly contagious and is spread from person-to-person through droplets from the mouth and nose. Those with rubella are considered infectious from seven days before the onset of a rash to seven days after.

As of Thursday, May 12, 2005, the total number of confirmed cases of rubella in the counties of Oxford, Brant and Haldimand-Norfolk is 156.

For more information on rubella, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 (TTY line is 1-866-797-0007).

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For further information:

Members of the media:

Dan Strasbourg

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

(416) 314-6197

Members of the general public: (416) 327-4327, or (800) 268-1154

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