

Pregnant teachers transferred after virus outbreak

OTTAWA - Three boards of education in Ontario have been transferring pregnant teachers to different schools after outbreaks of an illness called fifth disease among schoolchildren.

In a precautionary measure, about 45 teachers have been transferred in the Ottawa region and 10 in the Peel area west of Toronto.

Fifth disease is a contagious viral infection also known as parvovirus b19 and slapped-cheek rash. Health Canada says it doesn't pose a serious threat to children.

However, first-time infections in pregnant women have been linked to miscarriages.

Dozens of schools in the Ottawa area have reported cases of the viral disease among their schoolchildren.

"I would say [there are] 60 schools this year that have reported outbreaks. So that is significantly higher than last year," said Paula Arnold, of the Ottawa Public Health Department.

"Generally speaking, we would move five to six teachers a year," said Julian Hanlon, deputy director of the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board. "This year we've had to move 15 teachers."

The Peel school board has moved at least 10 pregnant teachers away from schools where the disease has been reported over the past six weeks.

And the Ottawa public board has re-assigned about 30 pregnant teachers so far this year.

By adulthood, between 50 per cent and 80 per cent of the general population is immune to the disease because of childhood exposure.