

STOP
the SPREAD *of*
INFLUENZA.



INFLUENZA.

It's not just about you.

Every year, thousands of Ontarians fall ill with influenza. Some get severely ill, missing days of school, work or vacation. Some even die. But much of the illness caused by influenza can be prevented with a flu shot.

Protect yourself and those around you.

Free flu shots are available to you if you live, work or attend school in Ontario.

This fall, get a flu shot.

Who should get the shot?

Unless there is a medical reason not to, everyone aged 6 months or older can benefit from getting the flu shot.

Remember, you need a flu shot every year as the virus changes.

Who should not get the flu shot?

- Individuals with severe allergies to eggs or egg products.
- Individuals with known allergies to preservatives such as: Thimerosal, Formaldehyde or Neomycin (depending on the flu vaccine being used).
- Individuals with a previous proven allergic reaction to the flu shot.





What are the upsides to the flu shot?

- Your chances of getting very sick from influenza and likely missing work and other responsibilities are reduced.
- Depending on how well the vaccine is matched to this year's influenza virus, **the flu shot will reduce your risk of sickness by 70-90%.**
- Kids have a higher rate of infection with the flu virus (about 40% chance of getting sick). **Vaccinating your children can reduce influenza symptoms in household members by about 42%. If however, all household members get vaccinated, fever and illness symptoms can be reduced by up to 80%.**
- If you are, or come into contact with, an elderly individual or someone with a compromised immune system (e.g. people on chemotherapy) **getting the flu shot could be life saving.**

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What are the downsides to the flu shot?

The influenza vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing side effects, which can be either mild or, in few cases, severe. The risk of the vaccine causing serious harm is extremely small. Almost all people who get the flu vaccine have no serious problems. Most people who get the vaccine have either no side effects, or mild side effects such as soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given. Life-threatening allergic reactions are very rare. If they do occur, it is within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccine.

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (or GBS) is a very uncommon disease that causes muscle paralysis and has been associated with certain infectious diseases. Overall, the risk of GBS occurring in association with vaccination is small. In comparison to the small risk of GBS, the risk of illness and death associated with influenza are much greater. Because it is not known whether influenza immunization increases the risk of recurrent GBS, it is recommended that persons who developed GBS within six to eight weeks of a previous vaccination should not be vaccinated at this time.

The risk of a serious side effect from the influenza vaccine is rare.

Almost all people who get the influenza vaccine have no serious problems.

Why your kids should get the flu shot.

Children between the ages of 6 to 23 months are at increased risk of hospitalization due to influenza and related complications. This is compared to older children and young adults. Once a child enters daycare, school, or begins playing with groups of children, their close contact enables the influenza virus to spread quickly and easily. This increases the risk of illness. It also means that children are one of the main spreaders of the virus both at school and at home.

Facts about children, influenza and immunization:

- All children should receive the influenza vaccine if they are 6 months of age or older.
- Healthy children 6-23 months of age are at high risk of influenza-related complications and should be immunized.
- Children under 9 years of age may need two doses of vaccine. Please check with your health care provider.
- Children and teenagers who are being treated with aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) for long periods may have an increased risk of developing Reye's syndrome if they get influenza and should be immunized.
- Children with chronic medical conditions are at high risk of influenza-related complications and should be immunized.
- The vaccine is well tolerated by children.

Complications from influenza can be very serious. The flu shot can help reduce the risk of contracting this illness. There are reasons why some people are unlikely to get an influenza immunization. Some admit they're afraid of needles. Others believe some unfounded myths about the flu shot.

The following are some common myths and the real facts.

Myths About Influenza

myth 1

I didn't get a flu shot last year and I didn't get sick.

Fact: Even though you have avoided getting influenza so far, it does not mean that you will not get sick this year. Every year, different strains of influenza virus circulate. With a flu shot, you decrease your chances of becoming ill.

myth 2

I'm young and healthy. I don't need a flu shot.

Fact: Even healthy children and young adults can become seriously ill. On average, **influenza can leave you ill for up to seven days**, causing absenteeism from work, school or vacation. Plus, there's a chance you might infect others at much greater risk than you of becoming seriously ill: young children, the elderly, or someone with a medical condition. These persons, among others, could develop serious complications from influenza and may need to be hospitalized.

myth 3

I don't need another flu shot. I got one last year.

Fact: **A flu shot is needed every year.** There are many strains of influenza virus with slightly different characteristics. The strains change, and each year a new vaccine is produced that provides protection against the three most common strains predicted for the coming season. Protection by the vaccine develops within two weeks after you have had the flu shot, and may last up to one year.

myth 4

You should not get the flu shot if you are pregnant.

Fact: The flu shot is safe and recommended for all pregnant women. Researchers estimate that an average of 1-2 hospitalizations can be prevented for every 1,000 pregnant women vaccinated.

myth 5

Getting a flu shot will give me influenza.

Fact: This is simply not true. The vaccine does not contain live virus. Many people confuse influenza with a cold or other respiratory infections, which the influenza vaccine will not protect them against.

myth 6

Influenza is just a bad cold.

Fact: Influenza is much worse than a cold. Even healthy, young people can become quite ill and serious complications, such as pneumonia, can develop from influenza.

myth 7

Flu shots aren't worth getting because they're not very effective.

Fact: A flu shot is about 70 to 90 per cent effective in preventing influenza in healthy children and adults, when the vaccine is a good match to the strains circulating that influenza season. Vaccine effectiveness varies from one person to another, depending upon their general state of health. Some individuals who get a flu shot can still get influenza. But if they do, it is usually a milder case than it would have been without the shot. Influenza immunization can decrease the incidence of pneumonia, hospital admission and death in the elderly.

What more can you do to avoid getting sick?

- Avoid people who are coughing and sneezing.
- Teach your family to cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze and to dispose of tissues properly. If you don't have a tissue handy, sneeze or cough into your upper sleeve.
- If you or a family member are ill with influenza, stay at home and rest. Do not go to work or school.

Washing your hands thoroughly and often may reduce your chances of getting sick.

- Use soap and warm running water.
- Wash hands often and especially after coughing and sneezing and after touching surfaces that others may have touched.
- Keep an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (gel or wipes) handy at work, home, and in the car.

Want to learn more?

Call **1-877-844-1944** (TTY 1-800-387-5559) to find a clinic near you.

You can also learn more by visiting our website at **www.gettheflushot.ca**.