

Influenza and Influenza Vaccine

What is influenza?

Influenza (commonly known as “the flu”) is a serious, highly contagious, acute respiratory infection that is caused by a virus.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

People who get influenza may have a dry cough, fever, chills, sore throat, headache, muscle aches and fatigue.

Illness due to influenza usually lasts two days but can vary from one to four days. The cough and fatigue can persist for several weeks, making it difficult to return to full personal and work activities.

People of any age can get the flu. Most people who get influenza are ill for only a few days. However, some people may become very sick and need to seek medical care.

How does the flu spread?

The flu spreads easily from infected people through coughing and sneezing. It also spreads through direct contact with contaminated surfaces, unwashed hands, or objects such as toys and eating utensils that have been contaminated by the influenza virus.

Adults are infectious from 24 hours before symptoms appear up until three to five days afterwards. Young children are infectious from 24 hours before symptoms appear up until seven to 10 days afterwards. The infectious period may be even longer in severely immunocompromised individuals.

How can the flu be prevented?

You can help to prevent the spread of the flu by getting immunized and following these tips:



- Wash your hands well and often with soap and warm water. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer

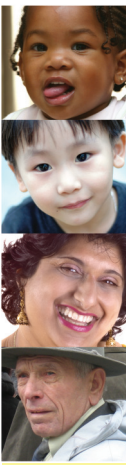


- Sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm to cover your mouth and nose



- Stay at home if you are ill

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca



- Practice social distancing (i.e., minimizing contact with family members, not going out in public) while symptomatic
- Wait 24 hours after symptoms have resolved before returning to work or school

How effective is the influenza vaccine?

The effectiveness of the influenza vaccine in preventing the flu depends upon how well the vaccine is matched to the strains of flu circulating in the community.

The viruses that cause influenza change often, and so the influenza vaccine changes from year to year. Every year, experts must predict which flu strains will likely be circulating in the coming flu season and prepare a suitable vaccine.

Influenza vaccine typically protects against two strains of influenza type A and one strain of influenza type B. If the vaccine is a good match to the circulating flu viruses, it will be effective in about 80 per cent of young adults. Even when there is a vaccine mismatch, immunization with the influenza vaccine may still offer some cross protection.

Protection from the vaccine develops about one to two weeks after the shot, and may last up to one year. Because no vaccine is 100 per cent effective, we know that the more people are immunized, the less likely it is that vulnerable members of the population will be exposed to this illness.

Who should get the influenza vaccine?

Influenza vaccine is encouraged for people six months of age and over, and is provided free of charge to all people living or working in Ontario. One dose is required every year. Children younger than nine years of age who are getting the influenza vaccine for the first time require two doses of vaccine to be given four weeks apart.

Influenza immunization is particularly recommended for people who are at high risk of influenza-related complications; people who are capable of transmitting influenza to individuals at high risk of complications; and people who provide essential community services. In addition, the vaccine is recommended for the following groups:

- Adults and children with chronic health conditions
- People of any age who are residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities
- People 65 years of age and older
- Healthy children six to 23 months of age
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women
- People who provide essential community services
- Health care workers
- Travelers

The influenza vaccine is not made with a live virus and it cannot cause the disease.

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If you are being treated for an infection or you have a fever, it is recommended you wait until you are well before getting the flu vaccine. Individuals who have a mild illness (such as mild upper respiratory tract infections) may be given influenza vaccine.

See your physician to get the flu shot if you have:

- Had a past reaction to a previous dose
- Been diagnosed with an egg or chicken meat allergy, or are allergic to neomycin, thimerosal, or formaldehyde
- Had Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within eight weeks of a previous influenza immunization

What are the possible side effects from influenza vaccine?

Most people will not have any side effects. A few people may experience soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site, fever or muscle aches. These symptoms are usually mild and will go away in a few days. Serious side effects are very rare. If an allergic reaction is going to occur, it will usually happen within several minutes of receiving the shot.

Is there any treatment for the flu?

New antiviral medications can be prescribed for people who do get sick. These help to reduce the sick period by one to two days if started within 48 hours after onset of the illness. If you get the flu, follow the tips discussed in “*How can the flu be prevented?*” (see Page One) to prevent spreading the flu to others.

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