

# INFLUENZA (FLU) AND INFLUENZA VACCINE

## What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a serious respiratory infection caused by influenza A and B viruses. It spreads quickly and easily from person to person and occurs each year in the late fall and winter months.

## What are symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms of the flu are more severe than just the common cold and often include:

- High fever
- Chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue

Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur in children.

Most people recover from the flu within a week to 10 days, but some including people 65 years of age and older, pregnant women and people with chronic health conditions (e.g., asthma, heart disease, diabetes, and others) are at greater risk of developing severe health problems such as pneumonia when ill with the flu that may require hospital care.

## How does the flu spread?

The flu easily spreads from person to person through coughing and sneezing (when droplets containing the flu virus are released into the air then land on to the face, mouth, and eyes of another person). It also spreads through touching surfaces, unwashed hands, or objects such as phones and toys that have been contaminated by the influenza virus and then touching your face, mouth, or eyes. Adults infected with the flu can infect other people one day before they even have symptoms and up to five days after becoming sick. Children and people with weakened immune systems may be able to spread the virus for even longer than that.

If you are exposed to a person with influenza you may develop signs and symptoms in one to four days.

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## PUBLIC HEALTH

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## How can the flu be avoided?

- **Get the flu shot every year.** Flu shots are available in participating pharmacies, health care provider's offices, and through [York Region Public Health](#).
- Wash your hands well and often with soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and throw the tissue out immediately. Wash your hands afterwards. Cough in your upper sleeve if you don't have a tissue
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- Stay home when you're sick
- Clean (and disinfect) surfaces and shared items

Be sure to eat healthy, keeping active, and getting plenty of sleep to keep your immune system strong.

## Who should get the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine, commonly known as the flu shot, is recommended for all individuals six months of age and older that live, work or go to school in York Region. It is a safe and effective vaccine that is available in participating pharmacies, health care provider's offices, medical walk-in clinics and through [York Region Public Health](#).

## Who is at high risk in getting the flu?

Individuals who are at high risk of developing complications from the flu and for whom the flu vaccine is especially important, includes:

- Pregnant women (the vaccine is safe in pregnancy)
- People who are residents of nursing homes or other chronic care facilities
- People 65 years of age and older
- All children six months of age to five years of age
- Indigenous peoples
- Adults or children with chronic health conditions (e.g., asthma, heart disease, diabetes, and others)

Those who live with or have close contact with the high risk groups listed above are a priority for getting the flu shot since they can spread the flu to high risk people. They include:

- Those that live with people at high risk of flu-related complications
- Health care workers and other care providers in facilities and community settings
- Persons who provide care to children less than five years of age
- Individuals who provide services with a closed or relatively closed setting to persons at high risk (e.g., crew on a ship)

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care also recommends swine and poultry industry workers receive the annual flu shot as early as possible.

## Facts about the seasonal flu vaccine

- The flu vaccine is a safe and effective way to protect you, your family and those around you **from** getting the flu
- The flu vaccine available for children six months and older will protect against four strains of flu viruses expected to spread during the current flu season
- There are different types of flu vaccine available that depend on your age and medical conditions
- An alternate high-dose flu vaccine is available for adults 65 years of age and older and offers protection against three strains of flu viruses. Speak to your health care provider for more information. **New for 2020-2021 flu season:** This high dose flu vaccine is now available at pharmacies
- People allergic to eggs can receive the flu vaccine
- Flu vaccine effectiveness can change from year to year. During years when there is a good match between the flu vaccine and circulating viruses, the flu vaccine can prevent the flu in up to 60 per cent of the overall population. In years where the vaccine is less effective at preventing the flu, it still works well to lower the risk of serious complications (like pneumonia) for people who get infected with the flu
- **The influenza vaccine cannot cause the flu**

It is important to get the flu shot as early as possible as it takes nearly **two weeks** for the influenza vaccine to take full effect.

## What are the possible side effects from flu vaccine?

Most people will not have any side effects. Some 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 may happen within several minutes to several hours of receiving the flu shot. You should stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after getting the flu vaccine so the nurse can watch for any immediate signs of a reaction.

## Is there any treatment for the flu?

In some situations, antiviral medications might be prescribed by your health care provider. These help to reduce the duration and severity of illness by one to two days if started within 48 hours after becoming sick. For more information about flu and flu vaccine, visit [york.ca/flu](http://york.ca/flu).