

YOUR SEASONAL FLU GUIDE

- What is the seasonal flu?
- What can you do to prevent the seasonal flu?
- Resources



WWW.FIGHTFLU.CA



Public Health
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What is the seasonal flu?

- ▶ Seasonal influenza, or the seasonal flu, is a common and highly contagious respiratory infection that affects the nose, throat and lungs
- ▶ The flu strains change from year-to-year, that's why it is important to get an annual flu shot
- ▶ Full protection against the flu takes about two weeks from the time you get the shot and lasts about six months
- ▶ In Canada, the flu season typically occurs between November and April
- ▶ Most people recover from the flu in about a week, but some people – including infants, children, adults and the elderly with chronic health conditions (such as diabetes and cancer) – are at greater risk of serious complications such as pneumonia
- ▶ Yearly exposure to existing strains of the flu provides some levels of immunity to seasonal flu

Did You Know?

Seasonal influenza is a serious illness that infects millions of Canadians every year.



What is the difference between seasonal flu and a cold?

Everyone is at risk of catching the flu virus – even healthy, young adults.

While symptoms may vary from person to person, they may include the following:

| | SEASONAL FLU | | | COMMON COLD |
|--------------------|---|---|--|--|
| WHAT IS IT? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Influenza, or the flu, is a common and highly contagious, infectious respiratory disease that affects the nose, throat and lungs. ➤ Influenza viruses can change rapidly. That's why there is a new flu shot made every year to protect against the circulating virus strains. | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A cold is a mild infection of the nose and throat caused by a variety of viruses. ➤ Although a cold might linger, the symptoms remain mild. |
| SYMPTOMS | <p>Almost Always</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sudden onset of cough and fever | <p>Common</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Fatigue ➤ Muscle Aches ➤ Sore Throat ➤ Headache ➤ Decreased Appetite ➤ Runny Nose | <p>Sometimes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nausea ➤ Vomiting ➤ Diarrhea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Runny nose ➤ Sneezing ➤ Cough ➤ Sore throat |

If you develop the following symptoms, you should see a healthcare provider right away:

- Shortness of breath, rapid or difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Bluish or grey skin color
- Bloody or coloured mucus/spit
- Sudden dizziness or confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting
- High fever lasting more than three days
- Low blood pressure

Additional symptoms to watch for in children include:

- Not drinking enough fluids or eating
- Not waking up or interacting
- Irritability (not wanting to play or be held)



How is seasonal flu different from an influenza pandemic?

An influenza pandemic is declared when a new strain of flu virus emerges that has never been seen before and begins to spread quickly around the world. For example, in June 2009, the World Health Organization declared the H1N1 flu virus outbreak a pandemic. This was a new strain of influenza and, because people had little to no natural immunity, it had the potential to cause serious and widespread illness.



Did You Know?

It is estimated that 2,000 to 8,000 people — mostly seniors, children and those with chronic health problems — die each year from seasonal influenza.

Who is more at risk of complications from the flu?

The following groups are not more likely to get the flu. However, they are more at risk of developing complications or requiring hospitalization if they do get sick. An annual flu shot is recommended for people in these groups.

1. Adults and children with the following chronic health conditions¹:

- Heart disease
- Lung disorders (including bronchopulmonary dysplasia, cystic fibrosis and asthma)
- Diabetes and other metabolic diseases
- Cancer and immune compromising conditions (due to underlying disease and/or medical treatment)
- Kidney disease
- Blood disorders such as anemia or hemoglobinopathy
- Conditions that make it difficult to swallow properly or keep the airways clear of mucus

- Morbid obesity (Body Mass Index over 40)
- Children and adolescents with conditions treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid

2. Healthy children 6 to 23 months of age

3. Healthy pregnant women (important to know: the risk of hospitalization for complications of influenza increases in each trimester of pregnancy)

4. Aboriginal peoples

5. People of any age who are residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities

6. People 65 years of age and older

¹ National Advisory Committee on Immunization Statement 2011

What is an antiviral?

Antivirals are prescription medications used to treat viral illnesses, including the flu. If taken shortly after getting sick (within the first 24 to 48 hours), they can reduce flu symptoms, shorten the length of illness and may reduce serious complications.

If you have flu symptoms and you have one of the risk factors, contact your healthcare provider to determine if antiviral medications are recommended.



What can you do to prevent the flu?

You can play an active role in staying healthy and preventing the spread of the seasonal flu if you:

1. Get your flu shot

- You can protect yourself and others by getting an annual flu shot.

2. Wash your hands frequently

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer.
- Wash your hands:
 - › before and after eating
 - › after you have been in a public place
 - › after using the washroom
 - › after coughing and sneezing
 - › after touching common surfaces

3. Cough and sneeze into your arm, not your hand

- If you use a tissue, dispose of it as soon as possible and wash your hands.

4. Keep your hands away from your face

- In most cases, the flu virus enters the body through the eyes, nose or mouth.

5. Keep common surface areas clean and disinfected

- Doorknobs, light switches, telephones, keyboards and other surfaces can become contaminated with all kinds of bacteria and viruses which can live on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours.
- Regularly cleaning and disinfecting these surfaces with normal household disinfectants can help prevent the spread of viruses.

6. If you get sick, stay home

- If you think you have the flu and are otherwise healthy, you should stay home from school or work until you are feeling well and able to fully participate in regular activities. If your symptoms get worse, call your health care provider.

7. Stay healthy

- Eat healthy foods and be physically active to keep your immune system strong.



Did You Know?

You can be a role model for kids:

- Teach children to count to 20 when they wash their hands
- Show children how to cough or sneeze into their sleeve or elbow – not their hand

Who should get the flu shot?

Although the Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that everyone older than six months get the flu shot, it is especially important for people who are at higher risk of complications from influenza (see page 5).

It is also important for the people who take care of others to have the flu shot, to prevent spreading the flu to those they care for. This includes:

- Health care and other care providers who could transmit the flu to those at high risk of complications.
- Adults and children who live with a person at high risk of complications from influenza (even if the person at high risk has been immunized). This is particularly important for:
 - › People who live in a household with infants younger than 6 months of age as these infants are at high risk of complications from influenza but cannot receive the flu shot.



- › Pregnant women and other members of a household expecting a newborn during the flu season.
- ▶ Those providing regular child care to children under 24 months of age.
- ▶ Those who provide services within closed or relatively closed environments to people who may be at high risk for complications of influenza (e.g. crew on a ship).
- ▶ The flu shot is also recommended for:
 - › People who provide essential community services.
 - › People in direct contact with poultry infected with avian influenza during culling operations.



Did You Know?

The flu shot can prevent flu illness in up to 70-90% of healthy children and adults.

More Information

For more information on how to fight the flu please visit: www.fightflu.ca.

You can also consult the following list of health information services:

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| ALBERTA | 1-866-408-5465 |
| BRITISH COLUMBIA | 8-1-1 |
| NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR | 1-888-709-2929 |
| MANITOBA | 1-204-788-8200 or toll-free 1-888-315-9257 |
| NEW BRUNSWICK | 1-800-580-0038 |
| NORTHWEST TERRITORIES | 1-867-920-8646 |
| NOVA SCOTIA | 8-1-1 |
| NUNAVUT | 1-867-975-5700 |
| ONTARIO | 1-877-844-1944 / TTY: 1-800-387-5559 / TTY (Toronto): 1-416-327-4282 |
| PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND | www.gov.pe.ca/flu |
| QUEBEC | 8-1-1 |
| SASKATCHEWAN | 1-877-800-0002 |
| YUKON | 8-1-1 |

Additional Resources

Immunization

A Parent's Guide to Immunization

Public Health Agency of Canada

www.publichealth.gc.ca/immunization

Physical Activity

Physical Activity: Tips and Information

Public Health Agency of Canada

www.publichealth.gc.ca/paguide

Healthy Eating

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide

Health Canada

www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide





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