Wellness Snapshot

Influenza Vaccines



Influenza vaccines ("flu shots") are vaccines that protect against the strains of influenza viruses that research indicates will be the most common during the upcoming season.

In Canada and the United States, guidelines recommend that everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccine every year as circulating flu viruses change yearly. It takes about 2 weeks from the time you are vaccinated until full protection develops.

Getting a flu shot every year is the most effective way to protect yourself against the flu and flu-related complications. The effectiveness of the influenza vaccine can vary from season to season, based on how well matched the vaccine is to the strains of influenza that are circulating – but on average it can reduce your risk of flu by 50%. The flu shot helps to:

- **Reduce the risk of getting sick with the flu** if you are exposed to the influenza virus
- **Reduce the severity of illness and the risk of flu-related complications** (e.g., sinus and ear infections, pneumonia, inflammation of the heart and other organs) in people who get vaccinated but still get sick with the flu
- **Reduce the risk of hospitalization** related to the flu
- **Protect people around you**, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu-related illness (e.g., babies, young children, older adults, and people with chronic health conditions)

In 2026 there has been a higher rate of flu in October than in past years, suggesting an earlier start to the influenza season. This means it is important to get your flu shot as soon as possible, particularly if you are at high risk for complications of influenza. Flu shots are becoming available now across Canada and the United States, but access may vary depending on your risk status and location. Please reach out to your health care provider or local public health authorities if you have any questions on where, when, or how to access the vaccine.

Side effects after a flu shot are usually very mild (e.g., arm soreness, headache) and resolve on their own within a few days, and severe adverse reactions to the flu shot are extremely rare.