

flu fact

The flu can spread to others with just one sneeze.

“Each year, thousands of Ontarians fall ill with the flu. Some get severely ill, missing days of school, work or vacation. Some even die. But much of the illness caused by flu can be prevented with a flu shot. Protect yourself and those around you. If you live, work or attend school in Ontario, it’s free. **This fall, get a flu shot.**”

Dr. Sheela Basrur
Chief Medical Officer of Health

Who should get the shot? Everyone.

Unless there is a medical reason not to, everyone aged 6 months or older can benefit from getting the flu shot. Getting the shot is also very important for some people because they have a greater risk of developing complications from the flu. Or they may spread it to others at high risk because they are in close contact or live in the same household.

It is recommended that all eligible Ontarians receive the flu shot. Remember, you need a flu shot every year. The risk of the vaccine causing serious harm is very small. However, you should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccination with your health care provider.

Myths about the flu

Complications from the flu can be very serious. The flu shot can help reduce the risk of contracting this illness.

There are many reasons why some people are unlikely to get a flu vaccination. A few people are severely allergic to eggs and shouldn’t get a flu shot. Others admit they’re afraid of needles. Still others believe some unfounded myths about the flu shot. These are some common myths and the real facts.

myth 1

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

Fact: Even though you have avoided getting the flu so far, it does not mean that you will not get sick this year. Every year, different strains of the flu virus circulate. By not getting the flu shot, you are increasing 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, the flu can leave you ill for up to seven days, causing lost time 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 groups, among others, could develop serious complications from the flu and may need to be hospitalized.

m y t h 3

Getting a flu shot will give me the flu.

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

m y t h 4

The flu is just a bad cold.

Fact: The flu is much worse than a cold. Cold symptoms and complications are much milder than that of the flu.

m y t h 5

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 flu in healthy adults, when the vaccine is a good match to the strains. In children, it's about 83 per cent effective. Among the elderly, the vaccine can help prevent pneumonia and hospitalization in about six out of 10 people and is up to 85 per cent effective in preventing death. 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 the flu. But if they do, it is usually a milder case than it would have been without the shot.

m y t h 6

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 the flu 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 from the vaccine develops by about two weeks after the flu shot, and may last up to one year.

Why your kids should get the flu shot.

Healthy young children aged 6 to 23 months are at increased risk of being admitted to the hospital because of flu symptoms compared with healthy older children and young adults. And once children enter daycare, school, or begin playing with groups of other children, their close contact enables the flu virus to spread quickly and easily among them. This helps make children one of the main spreaders of the virus both in the school and in the household.

Facts about children, the flu and vaccination:

- Only children 6 months of age and older can be vaccinated.
- Healthy children 2 years and older should be encouraged to receive the vaccine as they can also develop influenza illness and complications.
- Children under 9 years old getting vaccinated for the first time need two doses of vaccine – the second dose at least one month after the first.
- Children and teenagers (6 months to 18 years) who have been treated with aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) for long periods may have an increased risk of developing Reye's syndrome if they get the flu.
- Children with chronic medical conditions are at increased risk of flu-related complications.
- The vaccine is safe and well tolerated by healthy children. There is no evidence that it can cause neurological conditions such as autism, attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity disorder.

What more can you do to avoid getting sick?

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

- Use soap and warm running water.
- Wash hands at least five times a day.

There are other precautions you can take to help prevent getting the flu and spreading it to others:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough.
- If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve – not into your hands.
- Put used tissues in the wastebasket immediately.
- Avoid sharing food, eating utensils, towels or handkerchiefs.
- Keep an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (gel or wipes) handy at work, home, and in the car.

Want to learn more?

For more information on getting a flu shot, speak to your doctor, nurse practitioner, public health unit or pharmacist. Call **1-877-844-1944** (TTY 1-800-387-5559) to find a clinic near you. You can also learn more by visiting our websites at www.health.gov.on.ca and www.HealthyOntario.com.

The flu. It's not just about you.