

For Immediate Release
November 16, 2006
2006/nr-132

MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT HELPING PROTECT ONTARIANS FROM INFLUENZA

Free Flu Shots Available To All Ontarians

TORONTO – The best way for Ontarians to protect themselves and others from the influenza virus is to get a free flu shot, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman and Health Promotion Minister Jim Watson said today.

“The flu is one thing you can’t afford to get, so receiving a free flu shot is certainly a smart thing to do to protect yourself and others,” Smitherman said. “The flu spreads easily and can lead to serious illness for the very young and the elderly. In fact, most people don’t realize that the influenza virus is one of the leading causes of death in Ontario. Get vaccinated.”

Ontario's Universal Influenza Immunization Program – the first of its kind in North America - is in its seventh year. Flu shots are free to anyone aged six months or older who lives, works or attends school in Ontario. They are available across the province through doctors' offices, employer-sponsored clinics, public health units, local pharmacies, hospitals, long-term care homes, Community Health Centres and Community Care Access Centres.

Smitherman and Watson launched the 2006 flu shot campaign at the Toronto Dominion Centre in downtown Toronto. They also encouraged employers throughout the province to hold flu shot clinics for their employees.

“Doing what you can to keep your employees healthy is more than the right thing to do, it’s a smart business decision and will save you money,” said Watson. “Workplace flu shot clinics can reduce the incidence of flu-related absenteeism and prevent lost productivity.”

A 1995 study estimated that flu shots received by healthy working adults resulted in 43 per cent fewer sick days and 44 per cent fewer visits to doctors’ offices.

“The flu virus changes every year, and the vaccine is produced annually to protect you from the circulating strain. That’s why you need to get a shot every year,” said Sheela Basrur, Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health. “Check to see if your workplace has a flu shot program, and make sure your family members are vaccinated too.”

The flu shot campaign will be advertised in many languages through television, radio and newspapers. To find a convenient flu clinic location, call 1-877-844-1944; TTY 1-800-387-5559; or visit www.health.gov.on.ca. More information can also be found on www.HealthyOntario.com.

The flu shot program is just one of the ways the McGuinty government is protecting the health of

Ontario families. Others include:

- Introducing three new publicly funded vaccinations for chicken pox, meningococcal meningitis and pneumococcal disease
- Implementing the Smoke-Free Ontario Act, giving every Ontarian the right to be free from second-hand smoke
- Distributing more than 15,000 emergency infection control kits to front line health care providers across the province, as part of the province's pandemic preparedness plan.

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities - keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses.

-30-

Media Contacts:

David Spencer
Minister's Office
416-327-4320

A.G. Klei
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
416-314-6197

Members of the general public: 416-327-4327, or 1-800-268-1154

This news release, along with other media materials, such as matte stories and audio clips, on other subjects, are available on our website at: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca> under the News Media section.

For more information on achievements in health care, visit: www.resultsontario.gov.on.ca.

Disponible en français.