

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INFLUENZA AS YOU AGE

A Must-read For Older Adults

Just because you haven't had influenza (the flu) yet, doesn't mean you won't get it this year. Make sure you have all the facts.

QUESTION:
IF I'M HEALTHY,
DO I EVEN NEED
TO GET
VACCINATED?

ANSWER:

- **Even healthy people can get sick enough from the flu** to miss substantial time from work and impact their daily activities – some even end up hospitalized.
- Even a mild case of the flu is **contagious** and can be passed on to people you care about, including those most vulnerable, such as your grandchildren and those with cancer.
- In older adults, immune system function **naturally declines** with age, which increases their risk of contracting infections like the flu.

QUESTION:
CAN I GET
THE FLU FROM
THE FLU
VACCINE?

ANSWER:

- **No, you can't get the flu from the flu vaccine** – you can get the flu from someone else and even from surfaces harboring the flu virus, like door handles.
- Flu vaccines are made with viruses that are inactivated or weakened, they are not infectious and **cannot cause the flu**.
- Common reactions to flu vaccination may include: soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site, which generally lasts 1-2 days; muscle aches, headache and fever.
- You may have been infected with the virus before you got the flu vaccination or before the vaccine had a chance to take effect. *For the vaccine to take full effect, it typically takes up to 2 weeks.*

QUESTION:
HOW DOES THE
VACCINE "MATCH"
AFFECT MY
PROTECTION?

ANSWER:

- Even if the vaccine is not a "good" match, **the flu vaccine can still provide protection**.
- Individuals who get the flu vaccine:
 - Are more likely to be protected against the flu compared to those who are unvaccinated
 - Are protected against several different flu strains
- The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) still recommends flu vaccination for everyone 6 months of age and older because antibodies made in response to the flu vaccine can sometimes provide protection against different but related flu viruses.

NOTE: See reverse for age-specific flu information.

GET VACCINATED TO HELP PROTECT YOURSELF
AND PREVENT THE SPREAD OF FLU TO OTHERS

UNDERSTANDING THE UNIQUE INFLUENZA RISKS FOR OLDER ADULTS

The flu is a serious illness that can be deadly.

The more informed you are, the more you'll understand the importance of getting an annual flu vaccination.

Being immunized will help you protect yourself and prevent the spread of flu to those you care about.

ADULTS 50+

- As **adults 50 years and older** age, their immune system naturally begins to decline, which increases their risk of contracting infections like the flu.
- Adults 50 years and older have medical conditions that are more frequently linked to flu complications, compared to younger adults.
- Conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease increase the **risk of hospitalization and heart attacks** when combined with the flu.

ADULTS 65+

In addition to the facts for adults 50+:

- For **adults 65 years and older**, the flu is linked to 4 major causes of hospitalization:
 - Pneumonia
 - COPD[†]
 - Heart disease
 - Stroke
- 90% of flu-related deaths occur in adults 65 years and older.
- The presence of chronic conditions, such as diabetes, increases the likelihood of complications from influenza, hospitalizations and higher death rates.
- Influenza can cause older adults to **lose their independence** – adults can lose muscle strength every day they are bedridden in the hospital.
- Studies have found that as many as **1/3 of older adults** leave hospital with a significant loss of ability to carry out their activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing or eating.
- Influenza is the **3rd leading cause of catastrophic disability***, only behind congestive heart failure and stroke.

* Catastrophic disability is defined as the loss of independence in three or more basic activities of daily living (e.g. eating, dressing, and bathing).

† COPD = Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

In Canada, publicly funded flu vaccines may vary from province to province. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) provides a list of recommended vaccines according to age. Talk to your healthcare provider about the flu vaccine best suited for you.