



## Influenza (The flu)

Fall is generally when Influenza (flu) season begins. The flu season generally runs from November to April, affecting millions of Canadians of which approximately 500-1500 die every year from pneumonia complications related to the flu. Upper respiratory tract infections are a powerful trigger of asthma symptoms. Influenza virus is one of the major causes of these upper respiratory tract infections and vaccination can reduce the severity of asthma symptoms.

### What is the flu?

The flu is a common respiratory infection caused by various strains of the influenza virus. You will become infected if the virus enters your respiratory system. The virus can easily be spread by droplets sneezed or coughed into the air from an infected person. You can also become ill if you touch a contaminated surface or shake hands with an infected person and then touch your eyes, nose or mouth.

### Signs and Symptoms:

Influenza typically starts with a sudden fever, and chills, aching muscles and joints and a headache. Your whole body will feel ill. You may also have a lack of appetite and feel very tired. Children may have nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, but these symptoms are not common in adults. Recovery time is usually a week to ten days.

### Minimizing Your Risk:

The most effective way to protect yourself from the influenza is to be vaccinated each year in October or November. Regular hand washing is another way to help minimize your risk. By washing your hands often, you will reduce your chance of becoming infected.

Flu shots are especially important for:

- adults and children with chronic heart and lung disease
- anyone living in a nursing home or chronic care facility
- people 65 years of age and older
- people with chronic conditions such as diabetes, anemia, cancer, immune suppression, HIV or kidney disease
- children and adolescents on long term acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) therapy



- health care workers, other caregivers and household contacts capable of transmitting influenza to the above at-risk groups
- people at high risk of influenza complications who are traveling to areas where the flu virus is likely to be circulating

Certain groups should **not** be vaccinated. These include children less than six months of age and people who have had a severe allergic reaction to eggs or a previous dose of the vaccine.

Regular hand washing is another way to help minimize your risk. By washing your hands often, you will reduce your chance of becoming infected after touching contaminated surfaces.

If you get the flu, monitor your asthma symptoms closely and talk to your doctor if you have any symptoms. Increase the amount of fluids you drink (water, juice, and clear soup) and get plenty of rest for seven to ten days. If you take them within 48 hours of the start of your symptoms, they may reduce the length of your illness by an average of one or two days. Make sure you have talked to your doctor about getting a written Asthma Action Plan. Know what medications you should be taking when you get the flu.

### **The Vaccine:**

The vaccine is made from fragments of inactivated influenza viruses, grown in fertilized hens' eggs and then purified. The flu viruses change from year to year, so the vaccine is updated annually. After you get a flu shot, your immune system produces antibodies against that particular strain of virus. The antibodies are effective for about six months. If you are exposed to the influenza virus, the antibodies help to prevent infection or reduce the severity of the illness.

The benefits of flu shots far outweigh the risks.

### **Vaccine Side Effects:**

The flu vaccine cannot cause influenza because it does not contain any live virus. The most common side effect is soreness at the injection site. Other side effects might include: a fever, feeling tired, muscle aches. In most cases, the symptoms are mild and they go away within 48 hours.



### **Flu Vaccine Tips:**

- Getting a vaccination will not cause you to get the flu.
- Many provinces offer the flu vaccine free of charge.
- Anyone with asthma, despite their age needs a flu shot.
- Your doctor office and public health department have the vaccine in stock in September or October. Often they are made available in malls or schools, so it is convenient for you.
- Influenza vaccinations are safe in children and adults.
- Make an October appointment now for your vaccination.
- Put a reminder in your agenda or daybook

**The Asthma Society of Canada recommends that persons with asthma receive annual influenza vaccinations.**

For More Information:

Contact the Asthma Society of Canada at 1-866-787-4050 or visit [www.Asthma.ca](http://www.Asthma.ca).