

## ALL ABOUT THE FLU AND THE FLU SHOT

It's important to get the flu shot every year. This year, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important than ever.

### What is “the flu”?

“Flu” is short for “influenza”, a contagious respiratory disease caused by the influenza virus. The virus infects the nose, throat and sometimes the lungs.

The flu spreads from person to person much the same way as COVID-19: through droplets that come out of our mouths and noses when we breath, talk, cough or sneeze.

Flu symptoms are similar to those of COVID-19: fever, sore throat, runny nose, cough, headache, muscle aches, feeling tired or poor appetite. The flu can weaken your immune system. It can also aggravate existing health conditions such as diabetes, lung and heart disease. The flu can also cause severe inflammation of vital organs, requiring critical hospital care.

While anyone can get the flu, the very young, the elderly, and people with certain medical conditions are at higher risk of complications. The best way to protect yourself and avoid infection is to get a flu shot every year.

### Can I tell if I have the flu or COVID-19?

No.

Because the symptoms are very similar, you would need a COVID-19 test to find out whether you have the flu or COVID-19. That's one of the reasons it's so important to be protected against the flu.



### Will the flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

No, but it will protect you from the flu, or reduce the severity of the flu.

Keeping flu cases low will also prevent doctors' offices from being overwhelmed with additional patient visits. People who become very sick from the flu often have to go to the emergency room, and be admitted to the hospital. If flu and COVID-19 patients are all going to the hospital at the same time, this can overwhelm the system.



### Who should get the flu shot?

The flu shot is available to anyone over six months old.

- Children under nine years of age, with no previous flu vaccination, will need a second dose.
- Older adults aged 65-plus are at greater risk for serious complications from the flu. They should receive a high-dose flu vaccine, which provides them better protection.
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women should get the flu vaccine to reduce risk of severe illness from the flu. Vaccination can also pass on the mother's antibodies to the fetus, protecting the newborn.

People with acute respiratory infection symptoms should put off getting the flu shot to decrease the risk of spreading COVID-19 to others, including health-care providers, until:

- 10 days from the onset of symptoms or they have recovered, whichever is later; or
- If they test negative for COVID-19: 24 hours after their symptoms resolve or improve.

### Where can I get the flu shot?

Contact your doctor's office or local pharmacy to ask how and when they might be administering the flu shot. You can also visit the website of your local Public Health Unit to see if they have flu shot clinics in your community, and watch out for announcements for any other flu shot clinics near you.

The OMA thanks Toronto Public Health for providing portions of this Community InfoBulletin. ■