

Influenza

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What is the flu?

Flu is the short form for **infl**uenza. It is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by a virus. You may experience symptoms much like having a common cold, but flu symptoms are far more serious. They include fever, head/body aches and pains, weakness, sneezing, sore throat, cough and sniffles.

People with the flu are often bedridden for up to, or more than, a week.

What is the difference between the flu and the common cold?

Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Fever	Rare	Characteristic high (38-40°C), sudden onset, lasts 3-4 days
Headache	Rare	Prominent
General aches & pains	Slight	Usually, often quite severe
Fatigue & weakness	Quite mild	Extreme, can last up to one month
Bedridden	Never	Early
Runny, stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Usual	Sometimes
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Cough/chest discomfort	Mild to moderate	Common, can become severe, hacking cough
Complications	Ear ache, sinus congestion	Bronchitis, pneumonia - can be life threatening

Can the flu cause serious illness?

The flu is a major cause of absenteeism in the workplace. Up to 30% of the population may contract the flu each winter.

The flu can result in serious complications such as pneumonia, kidney failure and a variety of nervous system disorders - in some cases these complications are life threatening.

The **flu is one of the most contagious viruses found**. Anyone can become infected with influenza – even healthy young adults.

Who can get the flu?

Anyone can get Influenza, but for some people it can become a serious or even life threatening illness.

The flu can interfere with your leisure time. Plans for sports, leisure and vacation can be disrupted due to a bout with the flu.

Influenza causes absenteeism, which can become costly to you and to your employer.

The **flu is easily spread** - if you have family members living with you, and they are at high-risk, you protect them by protecting yourself with a flu shot.

High-risk groups

It is important for people who are in a **high-risk group** to get their flu shot, in order to reduce the impact of the flu. **You are part of a high risk group if you:**

- are an adult or child with chronic heart, lung or kidney disorders, or cystic fibrosis;
- have asthma, diabetes, severe chronic anemia, cancer or another long-term illness, or have received an organ transplant;
- are 65 years of age or over, or all those who live in a long-term care facility; and,
- children and adolescents (6 months to 18 years) with conditions treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid.

Can I protect myself from the flu?

Yes. The easiest way to protect yourself and those around you from getting the flu is to get your flu vaccination each fall.

Does the influenza vaccine work?

Yes! It works very well. Yearly vaccination prevents the flu in most people (75%), and can even save lives. In others, vaccination usually reduces the severity of the illness.

By the way, **you cannot get the flu from a flu shot.**

Who should NOT get a flu shot?

If you have a serious infection, you should **NOT** get a flu shot.

If you have an allergy to eggs or egg products, you should **NOT** get a flu shot.

Does the influenza vaccine have any side effects?

Less than 1-2% of recipients of the influenza vaccine will experience flu-like symptoms 24 to 48 hours after their dose. These side effects of the vaccine reflect an individual's unique response to the vaccine rather than a case of influenza. The side effects are short-lived and are not known to be associated with any decrease in overall protection.

The influenza vaccine is an inactive virus vaccine, which means that the virus particles are killed during the manufacturing process. Because the virus has been inactivated, the vaccine is not capable of causing an influenza infection.

Protection by the vaccine is not immediate. It may take an individual 10-14 days to develop a complete, protective response.

When do I get a flu shot?

October is Influenza Immunization Awareness Month – the time to start thinking about getting your flu shot.

Influenza season generally starts in November and it may carry through until April. Although it is best to get your flu shot before the flu season starts, it's never too late.

It's best to call your doctor to set up an appointment in advance.

The vaccine is available throughout the flu season for those who did not have the opportunity to get a shot in the fall.

Where can I get the influenza vaccine?

If you are a regular patient of a physician at the Albany Medical Clinic:

- Call us at (416) 461-9471 to ensure that the clinic has received the vaccine from the government supply.
- You may show up at the clinic:
 - **Monday to Friday** between 9:00 am to 11:30 am or 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm.
 - **Saturday** between 9:00 am to 11:30 am
- Report to your physician's receptionist to guide you to getting your vaccine.
- Visit our website for the office hours of our general practitioners (<http://www.albanyclinic.ca/mstaff/gp.htm>)

If you are not a regular patient of the Albany Medical Clinic, you can still get your vaccine here.

- When you arrive at our clinic, report to our registration desk and identify that you are here for the flu shot but not a current patient.
 - **(Monday to Wednesday, 9:00 am to 11:30 am or 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm)**
- You will then go to our nursing station where you will be screened and vaccinated.

Our clinic is located at: 807 Broadview Avenue, on the east side of Broadview, north from Danforth, in Toronto. The closest subway station is Broadview on the Bloor/Danforth subway line.

How much will I have to pay for the vaccine?

The Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) covers the cost of the influenza vaccine for residents of Ontario.

This information **is provided for information and educational purposes only**. It is not designed or intended to constitute medical advice or to be used for diagnosis. Consult with your personal physician to determine the appropriateness of the information for your specific situation and before making any decision regarding treatment and/or medication.