INTRODUCTION

The 2015–2016 influenza season is almost upon us. As such, it’s important to understand the many ways that you can protect yourself, your patients and clients, as well as your family, friends and colleagues against influenza.

It is estimated that between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of health care workers get influenza every year. Although most people with influenza are sick for only a few days, approximately 3,500 Canadians die in a given year from influenza and its complications, making it the most common infectious disease cause of death in Canada.

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES

As a health care professional, you are a key influencer and opinion leader within your community. When you get immunized against influenza, you’re not only protecting yourself, you are also helping to protect the numerous people in your personal and professional circles. You play a role in preventing influenza, especially in those people who are at higher risk, such as:

- **Young children aged 6 to 59 months**: Children in this age group are at higher risk of influenza-related doctor’s visits, hospitalization and death compared with healthy older children and young adults. In children younger than 2 years of age, higher rates of hospitalization occur due to influenza-related complications such as pneumonia, infection and seizures. Additionally, children 24 to 59 months of age are widely recognized as efficient transmitters of influenza in both schools and the community. In fact, up to 40 per cent of this population can be infected with influenza during any flu season. A study has shown that the influenza vaccine reduced children’s risk of flu-related hospitalization by 74 per cent during the 2010-2012 flu seasons.

- **Adults and children with chronic health conditions**. Many people with a chronic disease, or people with a weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people living with cancer), are at higher risk for contracting influenza — and at higher risk of developing complications if they do get influenza.

It is important to consider that people with long-term chronic conditions — diabetes, multiple sclerosis, or rheumatoid arthritis, for example — may not always divulge their health condition to family members, friends or colleagues.

For further information regarding high-risk populations, please visit the National Advisory Committee on Immunization website [Link: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/naci-ccni].
INFLUENZA FACTS FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

In both acute and long-term care settings, there is evidence that the burden of institutionally acquired influenza is significant:  

- The influenza vaccine is safe and well tolerated, and is the best defence against the flu.
- Health care workers are at higher risk of influenza than other adults.
- Being vaccinated prevents you from taking influenza home to family and friends, or passing it on to your patients and clients:  
  - According to several randomized controlled clinical trials, when health care workers were vaccinated against influenza, the incidence of death in the patients they cared for was reduced.
  - Staying home when you are sick helps to prevent the spread of influenza; however, people shed the virus and transmit influenza before they develop symptoms, and can pass on influenza without even knowing they are sick.
  - When you are vaccinated, your flu shot helps keep you healthy and thereby provides protection for patients, many of whom are at high risk of serious complications from influenza.

PEARL OF WISDOM:

Since you work in a high-risk environment, consider the many human interactions that you have each day. Whether in direct patient care or not, all staff should get the influenza vaccine. It reduces infection rates and improves patient outcomes within your health care facility.
As you are already aware, best practices from the Provincial Infectious Disease Advisory Committee (PIDAC) regarding protection from influenza during the flu season incorporate the following infection protection and control elements:

- Proper hand hygiene
- Respiratory protection\(^{12}\)
- Cover your mouth or nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Discard the used tissue into a wastebasket
- If you don’t have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands
- Stay at home when you are sick, as appropriate
- Use personal protective equipment when necessary (e.g. gloves, gown, facial protection)
- Education and training
- Get the influenza vaccine

Hand washing, sneezing or coughing into your sleeve, and staying home when you are sick all reduce the risk of influenza,\(^{12}\) but they’re not enough. Get the flu shot!\(^1\)

**PEARL OF WISDOM:**

*Consider these best practices at work and at home to ensure your entire network is protected from influenza. In effect, you are forming your own circle of protection, one that will safeguard you and your loved ones, as well as your colleagues and patients/clients.*

### WHO SHOULD GET THE FLU SHOT?

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommends that **all Canadians 6 months of age and older** should get the influenza vaccine. It is particularly important for health care professionals to be immunized to protect themselves and their patients.\(^1\)

The flu shot is safe and well tolerated. Most common reactions include soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site, lasting up to 2 days. Serious reactions from the vaccine are rare.\(^2\)

For further information, please visit the National Advisory Committee on Immunization website. [Link: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/naci-ccni/flu-grippe-eng.php]
PROTECT YOURSELF... PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY

As we enter the 2015–2016 influenza season, consider the following:¹

- The best defence against the flu is to get vaccinated. The flu can reduce the risk of serious illnesses and death due to influenza.
- Getting the flu vaccine protects you, your family and your patients/clients.
- Ensure that you have access to the latest clinical evidence, as well as support and advice from respected medical opinion leaders, to make the most informed choice for you and your community.

**PEARL OF WISDOM:**

*Everyone is susceptible to the flu. Get the flu shot every year and get it early since it can take up to 2 weeks to build up immunity.* ¹

**CONCLUSIONS**

Getting a flu shot is part of a healthy lifestyle. When you get vaccinated against influenza, you build up your immunity, making you stronger and more resistant to the virus.

To ensure a healthy lifestyle for you, your friends and family, and your patients and colleagues, get the flu shot so you will:

- Avoid becoming ill with influenza
- Avoid transmitting influenza to others
- Avoid loss of work time and income due to influenza

**PEARL OF WISDOM:**

*The best defence against the flu is to get vaccinated.* ²,⁵

We are one community and can work together to prevent influenza! Let’s get fluless!
REFERENCES


6. McGeer A. What is the Evidence that Health Care Worker Influenza Vaccination is a Patient Safety Issue? Toronto, ON: Mount Sinai Hospital; 2014.


