

GET THE FACTS ABOUT THE FLU SHOT

The flu is a serious disease that can lead to illness, hospitalization, or even death. Anyone can get the flu. Your best defence against getting the flu is to get the flu shot.

DOES THE FLU SHOT WORK?

The flu shot helps your body to build up its defences, making you more resistant to flu viruses. The flu shot is safe, and helps you stay healthy and avoid getting the flu.

Influenza viruses are always changing, so vaccines against the flu are updated every year. Each flu season, the flu vaccine is designed to protect against the most common viruses that are going around. That's why it is important for you to get vaccinated every year. During years when there is a good match between the flu shot and circulating viruses, the flu shot can prevent up to 60% of influenza infections in healthy adults and children. Protection can be lower in the elderly.

Sometimes, even though you get the flu shot, you might still get the flu. This could happen for a couple of reasons. You may have been exposed to a flu virus before you got the flu shot. Or, you might have caught a flu strain that wasn't covered by this year's flu shot. However, if you do get the flu after you have gotten the flu shot, you may not get as sick.

IS THE FLU SHOT SAFE?

The flu shot is very safe! Over the last 50 years, hundreds of millions of people have gotten a flu shot. Like all medicines, flu vaccine ingredients have been tested to make sure they are safe. Public Health Ontario and the Public Health Agency of Canada regularly check the safety of the flu vaccine.

Although some minor side effects may occur after you get the flu shot, they don't last long (usually just one or two days). The common side effects of the flu shot are soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given. Serious reactions to the flu shot are very rare.

WHAT IS IN THE FLU SHOT?

The flu shot contains dead viruses; because they are dead, the shot cannot cause the flu. You can't get the flu from the flu vaccine.

Flu vaccines contain small amounts of egg protein. The flu shot is still safe for people with egg allergies. Ask your health care provider if the flu shot is right for you.

IS THE FLU SHOT PAINFUL?

The flu shot may pinch or sting, but only for a few seconds. Getting the flu shot is very quick!

The best way to avoid pain when you are getting the flu shot is to relax your arm. If your arm muscle is tensed, the pain will be worse.

If you are worried about pain during the flu shot, you can use a medication that numbs the skin (either a cream or a patch). This medication can be purchased without a prescription. Talk to your health care provider about when and where to put on the cream or patch before you get the flu shot. After the shot, use a cool, wet cloth to reduce any redness, soreness or swelling in the area where the flu shot was given.

WHO SHOULD NOT GET THE FLU SHOT?

The following people **should not** get the flu shot:

- Infants under 6 months of age
- Anyone who had a serious allergy to a previous dose or any ingredient in the vaccine (except eggs)
- Anyone who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome within six weeks of a previous flu vaccination

Your health care provider can tell you about the vaccine ingredients and if it is safe for you. For more information about the flu vaccine, please visit ontario.ca/flu.