



# Workplace Influenza Immunization

Prepared by Peel Public Health  
2008

# Purpose

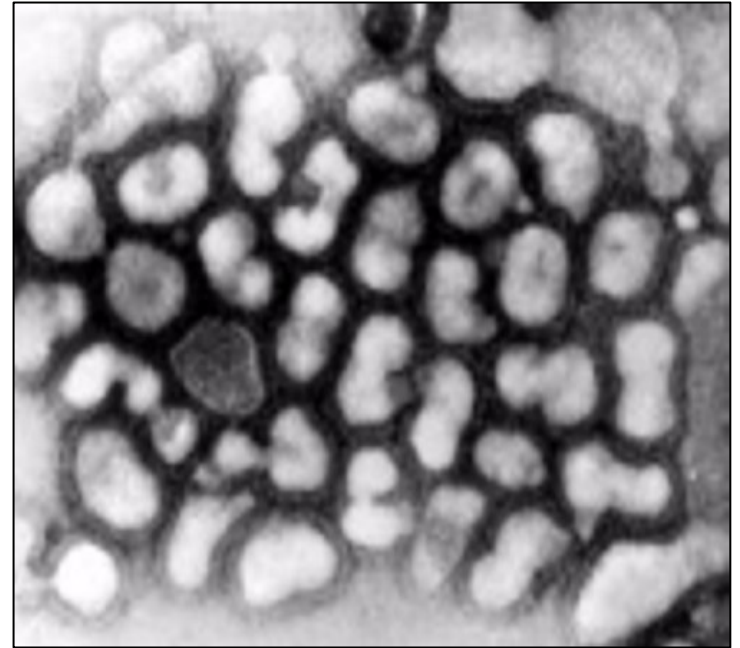
**To promote workplace influenza immunization and wellness by:**

- Providing workplaces with information about influenza and annual influenza immunization
- Increasing awareness about the importance of protecting yourself and others from influenza by receiving the annual influenza vaccine

# What is influenza?

## Influenza:

- Is a serious respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus
- Is commonly known as “the flu”
- Is much worse than a cold
- Can cause healthy people to become very ill
- Lowers the body’s ability to fight off other infections
- Can worsen a current medical condition



**Transmission electron micrograph of influenza A virus**  
Courtesy of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

# Did you know?

- Influenza virus infects millions of Canadians every year (Public Health Agency of Canada, PHAC)
- Up to 8,000 people will die due to flu-related complications like pneumonia (PHAC)
- The national goal of influenza immunization programs is to prevent serious illness caused by influenza and its complications, including death
- The vaccine is free to all Ontario residents over the age of six months

# How is influenza spread?



Courtesy of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- An infected person can spread the virus through the droplets that are released while coughing, sneezing or talking
  - The droplets can travel 1 to 2 meters in distance
  - We can “catch the flu” if:
    - we are within 3 feet/1 meter of someone who is infectious and they cough or sneeze
- and/or**
- we touch surfaces where these droplets have fallen and then touch our eyes, nose, or mouth before washing our hands

# What are the symptoms of influenza?



- Sudden high fever
- Sore throat
- Dry cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Headache, muscle aches all over body
- Extreme fatigue

**Note:** the elderly may not have a fever. Children may also have earaches, nausea, diarrhea and vomiting (Ministry of Health and Long Term Care)

# What do people say who have had “the flu”?

“I was so sick I couldn’t lift my head off my pillow for a week!”

“I have never been so sick in my life!”

“If you have had it, trust me...you never want it again....I’m getting the flu shot every year from now on!!”

# What is the difference between influenza (“the flu”) and a cold?

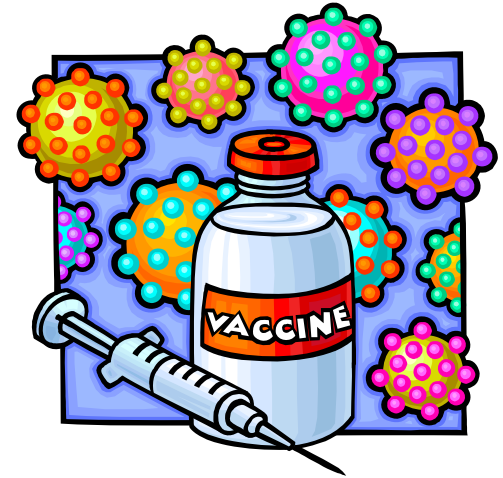
The flu is much worse than a cold. Cold symptoms and complications are much milder than that of the flu.

| Symptom                    | Cold                        | Flu   |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Fever                      | Rare                        | Usually high fever (102°F/39°C--104°F/40°C), sudden onset, lasts 3-4 days |
| Headache                   | Rare                        | Usual, can be severe  |
| Aches and pains            | Sometimes, mild             | Usual, often severe   |
| Fatigue & weakness         | Sometimes, mild             | Usual, severe, may last 2-3 weeks or more                                 |
| Extreme fatigue            | Unusual                     | Usual early onset, can be severe  |
| Runny, stuffy nose         | Common                      | Common  |
| Sneezing                   | Common                      | Sometimes   |
| Sore throat                | Common                      | Common  |
| Chest discomfort, coughing | Sometimes, mild to moderate | Can become severe   |
| Complications              | Unusual                     | Pneumonia, respiratory failure. Can be life threatening                   |
| Prevention                 | Frequent hand washing       | Annual vaccination and frequent hand washing                              |

Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion

# Why do I need the influenza vaccine every year?

- ✓ Flu viruses are always changing
- ✓ Flu continually circulates around the world
- ✓ The World Health Organization monitors the strains of circulating virus and makes recommendations for a new batch of vaccine each year to match the circulating strains
- ✓ The best time to get your influenza vaccine is early, between October and December, before the number of influenza cases increases in Canada (PHAC)



# Who should receive annual influenza immunization?



Everyone!

- Unless there is a medical reason not to, everyone 6 months of age or older can benefit from receiving annual influenza immunization (the “flu shot”)
- The Canadian National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) 2008 recommends annual influenza immunization for:
  - “...persons at high risk of influenza-related complications, those capable of transmitting influenza to individuals at high risk of complications, and those who provide essential community services; however, NACI encourages annual vaccine for all Canadians.”

# What are the benefits to employees and employers?

## Employees

- Promotes wellness by preventing illness and reducing absences from work
- Improves quality of life, morale and leisure time
- Reduces risk of transmitting flu to family, friends and co-workers

## Employers

- Reduces short term absenteeism and need for temporary employees
- Improves productivity
- Promotes wellness in the workplace
- Boosts corporate image and morale
- Reduces health care costs

(Journal of the Ontario Occupational Health Nurses Association, 1998)

# What are the side effects of receiving the “flu” vaccine?

- Most people have few or no side effects
- Possible side effects include:
  - Soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site
  - Mild fever or muscle aches for up to 2 days
  - Anaphylactic (severe) reactions are very rare

# What are some of the common myths about influenza (“the flu”)?





# Myths about the Flu



*I didn't get a flu shot last year and I didn't get sick.*

Even though you may have avoided getting the flu so far, it does not mean that you will not get sick this year. Different strains of the flu virus circulate every year.



# Myths about the Flu



*I'm young and healthy. I don't need a flu shot.*

- Even healthy children and young adults can become seriously ill with influenza. The flu can leave you feeling ill and unable to go to work or perform daily activities for up to seven days.
- There is a chance you might infect others who are at much greater risk than you of becoming seriously ill from influenza.



# Myths about the Flu



## *Getting a flu shot will give me the flu.*

- The vaccine does not contain live virus and cannot give you the flu. If you develop influenza within 2 weeks of receiving the flu vaccine, it is likely that you had already contracted the virus and were developing the flu at the time you were vaccinated.



# Myths about the Flu



*Flu shots aren't worth getting because they are not very effective.*

- When the vaccine is a good match to the current season's strains, a flu shot is 70% to 90% effective in preventing flu in healthy adults.
- In children it is about 83% effective.
- Among the elderly, the vaccine can help prevent pneumonia and hospitalization in about six out of ten people and is up to 85% effective in preventing death.



# Myths about the flu



## *The influenza vaccine causes Alzheimer's Disease.*

In reality, some studies have shown that past exposure to vaccine including influenza “may protect against subsequent development of Alzheimer’s disease”.

(Canadian Medical Association Journal, 27 Nov.2001:165 (11))



# Myths about the flu



## *The thimerosal in influenza vaccine causes autism.*

- Thimerosal is a chemical preservative which contains a type of mercury called ethylmercury. Thimerosal is used as a preservative in some vaccines to help keep them safe.
- The level of mercury exposure from vaccines is low. There is no proven scientific evidence to suggest that thimerosal in vaccines causes any health problems in children and adults.

# How can I protect myself and others from getting “the flu”?

- Get the flu shot every year
- Cover your nose and mouth with your sleeve or elbow when you cough or sneeze
- Stay home when you are sick to avoid spreading germs to others
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly
  - Use soap and water or alcohol based hand rub:
    - After sneezing or wiping your nose
    - Before touching your face (nose, mouth, eyes)



# How can I find an influenza vaccine clinic?

- Call Peel Public Health:

905-799-7700

- Visit the Peel Public Health website:

[www.peelregion.ca/flu](http://www.peelregion.ca/flu)

# How can I set up an immunization clinic in my workplace?

Visit the Peel Web Site:

[www.peelregion.ca/flu/workplace](http://www.peelregion.ca/flu/workplace)

**OR**

Visit the MOHLTC Web Site:

[www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

# Did you, your family, and your friends get your flu shot yet?

You may think that only older people need to worry about getting the flu. But who do you think they get it from?

Perhaps the only thing worse than getting the flu is giving it to someone close to you. Especially someone for whom the flu can lead to very serious complications. So make sure you protect yourself and others close to you by getting your free flu shot. Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or local public health unit. Call 1-877-844-1944 (TTY 1-800-387-5559). Or visit [www.health.gov.on.ca](http://www.health.gov.on.ca)

The flu. It's not just about you.



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Peel Health

 Region of Peel  
Working for you



Nothing works like the  
flu shot. And nothing  
works without it.

Worker absenteeism and lost productivity due to flu cost Canadian employers hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Quite the sum when you consider that a workplace flu clinic can pay for itself if flu is avoided in even one worker. Find out how you can sponsor a workplace clinic today. It's the most effective way to keep your employees at work this flu season. Visit [www.beattheflu.ca](http://www.beattheflu.ca) or call 1-877-844-1944 (TTY 1-800-387-5559).

**The flu. You can't afford it.**



Symptoms include  
fever, headache and a  
quiet fourth quarter.

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