

Influenza: The basics

Influenza (“flu”) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses.

Two types of influenza viruses cause the majority of infections in humans: influenza A and influenza B.

While influenza infection can be mild, in severe cases, it can lead to pneumonia (lung infection), heart problems, and hospitalization.

Influenza spreads through:

- close contact with others (e.g., coughing or sneezing next to someone)
- contact with contaminated surfaces



The people most likely to become severely sick if they catch influenza include:

- children under 5 years of age
- pregnant people
- people who are part of an underserved community
- adults 65 years of age or older
- residents of nursing homes or other chronic-care facilities, and
- people with chronic medical conditions

New strains of influenza appear every year. Getting your annual influenza vaccine (flu shot) is safe and the most effective way to help prevent influenza infection.



Influenza vaccines **cannot** give you influenza.

In Canada, it is recommended that all people 6 months of age and older be immunized against influenza.

Talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or local public health office about getting immunized against influenza.



References:

National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). (2024.) Statement on seasonal influenza vaccine for 2024-2025. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/national-advisory-committee-immunization-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2024-2025.html>

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2024.) Flu (influenza): Get your flu vaccine (flu shot). <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza/get-your-flu-shot.html>