

Preventing the spread of influenza at West Parry Sound Health Centre

What is influenza, and how easily is it spread?

Influenza, otherwise known as “the flu”, is a serious upper respiratory disease caused by a virus that can spread easily among people. Most adults can spread the flu virus from 24 hours before they have symptoms, and up to 3-5 days after their symptoms develop. The virus can survive on unwashed hands for 5 minutes, on tissues or clothing for 8 - 10 hours and on hard surfaces, such as tables or telephones, for 2 days

People with influenza have a sudden onset of fever, headache, muscle aches, fatigue and cough. While most healthy adults recover in two to seven days, the complications from influenza can be serious.

Influenza is not a cold. A cold may last for a week and symptoms include a runny nose, stuffy nose, cough and sore throat. Viruses that can cause the common cold are different from the influenza virus. Symptoms such as headache, fever, muscle aches, and nausea do not usually accompany a cold.

Why is it essential that all health centre staff receive a flu shot?

Many of our **patients** have health conditions that makes them more susceptible to getting influenza and in addition, to experiencing complications of influenza simply because their immune systems do not work at optimal levels; **even after receiving a flu shot**. When healthcare workers receive a flu shot, it acts as a protective layer for patients because it reduces the transmission rates of influenza to patients.

Can the influenza vaccination give you the flu?

The influenza vaccine will not give you the flu as it does not contain a live virus. At the time of year the flu vaccine is given, many viruses are circulating and illnesses caused by these other viruses can be mistaken for the development of influenza.

Is the influenza vaccine safe?

The influenza vaccine has been around for 50 years and is safe for most people. Check with your family doctor for more information.

Do you need to get the flu shot every year?

Yes. Flu viruses change from year to year, which means three things:

1. A vaccine made against flu viruses circulating last year may not protect against the newer viruses, which is why the flu vaccine is updated to include current viruses every year.
2. You can get the flu more than once during your lifetime.

3. Immune protection from previous year's flu vaccine may wane over 6 to 12 months.

When is the best time to get the flu shot and how long does it last for?

The best time to get your influenza vaccination is between October and December, before the number of influenza cases increases in Canada. Full protection against influenza takes about two weeks from the time you get the shot and lasts up to 12 months.

Related information:

- [Scheduled influenza vaccination clinics](#)
- [Get a flu shot - Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care](#)
- [Influenza](#)