

# The Facts About Influenza

## Influenza

### What is Influenza?

Influenza (commonly known as “the flu”) is a **acute respiratory illness** that is caused by a virus. People who contract influenza may have a fever, chills, cough, runny eyes, stuffy nose, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, extreme weakness and fatigue. Although individuals infected with influenza are only ill for a few days, the cough and fatigue can persist for several weeks, making the return to a full recovery difficult.

### Who is at Risk of Contracting Influenza?

People over 65 and adults and children with

chronic conditions, such as diabetes and cancer– are at a greater risk of more severe complications, such as pneumonia.

### How is Influenza Spread?

Influenza spreads by **respiratory droplets** from infected person through coughing or sneezing. Additionally, it is spread through **direct contact** with surfaces contaminated by the influenza virus, such as toys, eating utensils and unwashed hands.

Influenza results in an average of 20,000 hospitalizations and up to 8,000 deaths in Canada every year.

## Prevention: Influenza Vaccine

The influenza vaccine can prevent influenza illness in approximately 70-90% of healthy children and adults.

Individuals who receive the vaccine can still contract influenza, however, it is usually milder.

The vaccine does **NOT** protect against colds and other respiratory illnesses that may be mistaken for influenza.

The influenza vaccine does **NOT** contain the live virus, and thus, **CAN-NOT** cause the influenza.

### Health care and Immunization

Health care workers could transmit influenza to persons at a high risk of influenza through their activities.

Immunization helps protect the health of staff and also protects patients. Immunization of health care providers has been shown to **reduce** total patient mortality, influenza-like illness (ILI) and influenza. Its important to remember that elderly or immunocompromised persons may have a weaker re-

COLD	SYMPTOM	INFLUENZA
Rare	Fever	Usual high fever (102°F/ 39°C to 104°F/ 40°C)- sudden onset, lasts
Rare	Headache	Usual- can be se-
Sometimes, mild	General aches and	Usual- often severe
Sometimes, mild	Fatigue and weakness	Usual, severe, may last 2-3 weeks or
Unusual	Extreme fatigue	Usual early onset–
Common	Runny, stuffy nose	Common
Common	Sneezing	Sometimes
Common	Sore throat	Common
Sometimes, mild to moderate	Chest discomfort, coughing	Usual– can be severe
Can lead to sinus congestion or ear-ache	Complications	Can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure; can worsen a current chronic condition; can be life-

sponse to the vaccine in comparison to someone with a healthy immune system.

Healthy people should be vaccinated to protect themselves and their families from influenza. Influenza is much more severe than a cold, even young health individuals become quite ill. You may bring the influenza virus home to a baby, older relative, or someone with a medical condition who could develop serious complications from influenza.

### Side Effects

The influenza vaccine, like any medication, is capable of causing side effects which can be either mild, or very rarely severe. The risk of the vaccine causing harm is extremely small.

Influenza immunization for health care workers is a standard of care. In the absence of contraindications to the vaccine, refusal to be immunized again influenza is a failure in staff’s duty to provide safe care to patients.