



Influenza (flu) season

Last updated: **October 2023**

Flu vaccines are free for everyone 6 months and older. It's important to get your flu vaccine to protect yourself during the fall and winter. To learn more, visit [Government of British Columbia: Influenza vaccine \(flu vaccine\)](#).

Influenza is an infection of the respiratory system caused by the influenza virus. Every year there is a period of time when influenza spreads in our communities and causes disease and outbreaks. This is called the influenza season. The influenza season varies from year to year. The influenza season generally occurs during the fall, winter and early spring. On average, it starts in November or December, and lasts until February or March.

The severity of an influenza infection can vary from mild to severe. Getting sick from influenza can put you at risk of severe disease and its complications, including getting sick with other infections. These include viral or bacterial pneumonia, which affects the lungs. The risk of complications can be life-threatening. Each year, many Canadians die from influenza and its complications.

The symptoms of influenza can be similar to other respiratory illnesses including the common cold and COVID-19. Use the [BC COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) to find out if you or your family members need further assessment or testing for COVID-19. To learn more about symptoms, how it spreads and prevention visit the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) health feature](#). If you are sick, stay home until your fever is gone to help prevent the spread of the flu or potentially COVID-19. Avoid close contact with other people until you feel well enough to get back to your usual day-to-day activities.

Understanding what seasonal influenza really is can help prevent you and your family from becoming sick. Learn more about the health complications influenza can cause and who is most at risk.

Who should get an influenza vaccine?

Everyone 6 months of age and older should get a yearly influenza vaccination with rare exception. Vaccination is especially important for people who are at high risk of serious illness from influenza (such as young children, pregnant women, seniors 65 years and older, and people with certain medical conditions) and those able to transmit or spread influenza to those at high risk. This fall and winter, everyone in British Columbia who is six months of age or older can get the influenza vaccine free of charge.

Pharmacists can immunize people 4 years of age and older with injectable vaccines and 2 years and older with nasal spray influenza vaccine.

Common questions about influenza

Find answers to some of the [most common questions about influenza](#). Learn how serious it can be. Find out how it spreads, how long after exposure symptoms take to appear and what symptoms to look for. Find out what you can do to prevent influenza, from vaccination, to staying home when ill, to handwashing.

Featured topics

Influenza (the flu)

To learn about influenza, how to prevent it, what the symptoms are, what the home treatments are and more, see [Facts about influenza \(the flu\) \(HealthLinkBC File #12b\)](#).

Influenza vaccinations

Influenza vaccines are a safe and the most effective way to help people stay healthy, prevent illness and even save lives. To learn about influenza vaccinations, click on the links below.

- [Inactivated influenza \(flu\) vaccine \(HealthLinkBC File #12d\)](#)
- [Influenza \(flu\) immunization: Myths and facts \(HealthLinkBC File #12c\)](#)
- [Live attenuated influenza \(flu\) vaccine \(HealthLinkBC File #12e\)](#)
- [Why seniors should get the inactivated influenza \(flu\) vaccine \(HealthLinkBC File #12a\)](#)

Washing your hands

Hand washing is one of the best ways to keep yourself and others healthy. Regularly washing your hands can help stop the spread of germs, including the virus that causes influenza. To learn more, see [Hand washing: Help stop the spread of germs \(HealthLinkBC File #85\)](#).

Influenza policies and programs

- [Government of BC: Influenza Control Program: Frequently Asked Questions – Influenza Vaccine](#)
- [Government of BC: Influenza Control Program: Frequently Asked Questions – Masking](#)
- [Government of BC: Influenza Policy for Visitors](#)
- [Government of BC: Influenza Policy for Volunteers](#)

- [Government of BC: Provincial Influenza Prevention Policy](#)

Useful websites

BC Centre for Disease Control

BCCDC provides health promotion and prevention services, and diagnostic and treatment services to reduce communicable and chronic diseases, injuries and environmental health risks. BCCDC also provides analytical and policy support to government and health authorities.

- [Influenza](#)
- [Vaccines in BC](#)

Government of British Columbia

Learn more about the [influenza vaccine](#), including why getting the vaccine is important. Find out how to get the flu vaccine, and who is eligible to get it.

ImmunizeBC

ImmunizeBC works to reduce the number of infections by vaccine-preventable diseases in B.C. ImmunizeBC provides information on immunizations to individuals, families and health care providers. They also provide tools to make it easier for B.C. families to get immunized. For information on where you can locate influenza clinics across the province or to learn more about influenza and the influenza vaccine, click on the links below.

- [Frequently asked questions about influenza vaccines](#)
- [Influenza \(flu\) vaccine](#)

Government of Canada

Get answers to many questions about the [seasonal influenza](#), including symptoms, risks, treatment and prevention.

Information in the Influenza Health Feature is adapted from [Health Canada - National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#), accessed September 5, 2023, the [BCCDC: Vaccines in BC](#), accessed September 5, 2023 and [ImmunizeBC - Influenza](#), accessed September 5, 2023.