



# Key Messages Encouraging Your Employees to Get Their Influenza Vaccine

# Key Messages + FAQ for Employers

The influenza virus can cause serious illness, especially for high-risk populations like older adults, those living with chronic conditions, and young children. The best way to protect yourself and your employees from influenza is by getting vaccinated every year. Immunize Canada has developed a toolkit for employers to leverage as they facilitate influenza immunization conversations. For additional resources, visit <https://immunize.ca/>.

## **Influenza is a contagious respiratory infection that spreads quickly and easily, especially in the workplace.**

- Influenza can cause serious illness and lead to hospitalization in older adults, people with chronic medical conditions, and young children, but even healthy adults can become very ill from influenza.
- Influenza spreads when droplets of mucus or fluids from a cough or sneeze land on you or on common surfaces you touch, like a door handle.<sup>i</sup>
- Common symptoms of influenza are fever, headache, feeling very tired or weak, runny/stuffy nose, sore throat, coughing, and muscle aches.
- Healthy adults can transmit influenza before they develop symptoms, making it easy to spread to others.<sup>ii</sup>
- The seasonal influenza vaccine protects you, the people you work with, and your close friends and family.

## **The best defence against influenza is to get your annual vaccine. It not only protects you but your spouse, children, friends, and the people you work with, too.**

- There are simple things you can do to reduce the spread of influenza, like getting the seasonal influenza vaccine, washing your hands often with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds, coughing and sneezing into a tissue or the bend of your arm, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, and staying home when you're sick.
- Vaccination is the *most* effective way to reduce your risk of catching the influenza virus or spreading it to your family and friends.<sup>iii</sup>
- Influenza season is here and it's time to get your vaccine.
- It takes about two weeks for the influenza vaccine to work, so getting your vaccine as soon as possible is the best way to protect yourself and others from the influenza virus.

**Your health and safety are our top priority, and we are making it easy for you to be protected against influenza.**

- **ON-SITE CLINICS:** This year, our company is making seasonal influenza vaccination easy by offering all employees access through an on-site clinic. *[Include details on date and location.]*
  - You're due to get your influenza vaccine and we've reserved one for you.
- **OFF-SITE CLINICS:** All employees are encouraged to get vaccinated against influenza. Our company will do what it can to ensure you have the flexibility and opportunity to get vaccinated. Talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or local public health unit about the seasonal influenza vaccine, or book your next appointment here: *[Include appointment details and, if possible, provide a direct link to a local vaccination booking page.]*

# Key Messages + FAQ for Employers

## What is influenza (the flu)?

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Influenza types A and B cause most of the influenza illness in humans.<sup>iv</sup>

## What are the symptoms of influenza?

Symptoms of influenza typically include the sudden onset of fever, cough, and muscle aches. Other common symptoms include headache, chills, loss of appetite, feeling very tired or weak, and sore throat. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea may also occur, especially in children. If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms, stay at home and speak to your doctor.

## How do I prevent influenza?

It is important to protect yourself and those around you from influenza. The best way to prevent influenza is with annual influenza vaccination. And there are several additional actions you can take to prevent the spread of influenza at work and at home:<sup>v</sup>

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds, or use a hand sanitizer when soap and water is unavailable
- Cough and sneeze into a tissue or into the bend of your arm
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects
- Stay home and away from others if you're feeling sick

## How can I tell if I have influenza or COVID-19?

Influenza and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 seems to spread more easily than influenza, can cause more serious illnesses in some people, and takes longer before people show symptoms – and people can be contagious for longer.<sup>vi</sup> Because influenza and COVID-19 are similar, it may be hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. It is best to confirm your diagnosis with a test and follow COVID-19 prevention measures to help keep others safe.

## **What should I do if I get influenza?**

If you are experiencing influenza-like symptoms, you should rest and drink plenty of fluids. To help stop the spread of influenza, especially to those who are more likely to experience severe illness from the virus, you should avoid close contact with other people and stay home when you are feeling sick.<sup>vii</sup> Seek medical care if the symptoms are serious or if you have difficulty breathing.

## **Is influenza contagious?**

Influenza is highly contagious and can spread rapidly from person to person, by droplets of mucus or fluids carried in a cough or a sneeze, but also by touching contaminated surfaces. Healthy adults can transmit influenza before they develop symptoms, which is why it is important to be vigilant during influenza season.<sup>viii</sup>

## **I never get sick. Why do I need the influenza vaccine?**

Influenza symptoms may vary from person to person. While you may only get mildly ill from an influenza infection, others with higher risks for complications can get very sick. For some, influenza can even lead to hospitalization or death.<sup>ix</sup> Receiving the influenza vaccine not only protects you if you're exposed to the virus, but it protects the people around you, as you're less likely to spread the virus.

## **Why do I need an influenza vaccine every year?**

Influenza strains change from year to year, so influenza vaccination is required every year to protect you during the influenza season. Also, the effectiveness of the influenza vaccine wears off over time. Receiving a vaccine every year is important to help you stay protected.<sup>x</sup>

## **How safe is the influenza vaccine?**

The seasonal influenza vaccine is considered safe and benefits people of all ages. If you have questions or concerns about the influenza vaccine and its safety, talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or local public health unit.

## **Who is eligible to receive the influenza vaccine?**

Everyone 6 months and older is eligible to get the influenza vaccine. Vaccination is especially recommended for people at high risk of severe illness and hospitalization, and for people who provide essential services who can spread the illness to others who are at high risk or who cannot be vaccinated.<sup>xi</sup>

## **Can I get vaccinated against influenza if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?**

The influenza vaccine is considered safe and is recommended for all pregnant women at all stages of pregnancy and for breastfeeding mothers.<sup>xii</sup> However, pregnant women should not receive the Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV). If you have questions or concerns about influenza vaccines and pregnancy or breastfeeding, you should talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or local public health unit.

## **Who should NOT be vaccinated against influenza?**

While the seasonal influenza vaccine is recommended for people 6 months of age and older, there are some people who should not get the influenza vaccine, including:

- People who have had a serious allergic reaction, such as an anaphylactic reaction, to a previous dose or any of the vaccine components, with the exception of egg<sup>xiii</sup>
- People who have developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome within six weeks of a previous influenza vaccination

Additionally, people who SHOULD NOT receive the Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV) include:

- People with immune-compromising conditions (due to disease, therapy, or both)
- People with severe asthma
- Children less than 24 months of age or children currently receiving aspirin or aspirin-containing therapy
- Pregnant women

If you have questions or concerns about influenza vaccines, you should talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or local public health unit.

## **Are there side effects from the influenza vaccine?**

Most people who get the vaccine either have no side effects or mild side effects such as soreness, redness and itching where the influenza vaccine was given.

Some people may get a fever or muscle aches that start shortly after vaccination and may last 1-2 days. Life-threatening allergic reactions are extremely rare. If they do occur, it is within a few minutes to a few hours following vaccination. Your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist will ask you to wait 20-30 minutes following your vaccination, to watch for possible reactions.<sup>xiv</sup>

## How do I make my vaccination experience a more positive one?

While vaccinations can be a daunting idea, getting the seasonal influenza vaccine lowers your risk of illness and hospitalization. There are several things you can do before or during your appointment to make sure it goes well and as comfortably as possible:

- Have a snack before and after your vaccination
- Wear comfortable clothing, including a t-shirt or something that lets your upper arm be reached easily
- Bring an item that gives you comfort
- Ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist questions to help you feel more prepared
- If you're feeling nervous, try taking slow, deep breaths, or distracting yourself by talking to someone, or by scrolling, playing, reading, or listening to music on your phone

To learn more about what you can do, visit: <https://immunize.ca/card-adults>

## How effective is the influenza vaccine?

The effectiveness of the influenza vaccine can range widely from season to season and from person to person. There are at least two factors that play an important role in determining the likelihood that the influenza vaccine will protect a person from influenza:

1. Characteristics of the person being vaccinated (such as their age and health)
2. The similarity or “match” between the strain of influenza the vaccine is designed to protect against and the strain of influenza that is spreading in the community<sup>xv</sup>

During years when the influenza vaccine is not well matched to circulating viruses, the benefits of influenza vaccination may vary. During years when there is a good match between the influenza vaccine and circulating viruses, it's possible to achieve substantial benefits from vaccination in preventing severe influenza illness.<sup>xvi</sup>

## Can the influenza vaccine be given at the same time as other vaccines?

It is possible to receive other vaccines at any time before or after the influenza vaccine. However, conditions may vary, depending on the person receiving the vaccines. Talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or local public health office about receiving more than one vaccine at the same time.<sup>xvii</sup>

In general, it is safe to receive a COVID-19 vaccine if you have been vaccinated against influenza. However, it is not recommended that you receive an influenza vaccine at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccine. It is best to wait 14 days after any vaccine to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, and 28 days after your last COVID-19 vaccine before receiving any other vaccine.

### **When should I be immunized?**

The recommended time to get an influenza vaccine is between October to December. However, influenza vaccines may be beneficial when given any time from October to March, even after the start of influenza season.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **How long does it take for the vaccine to work?**

It takes about 2 weeks for the vaccine to work.<sup>xix</sup>

### **Where can I get the influenza vaccine?**

ON-SITE CLINICS: We are making influenza vaccination easy by providing an on-site influenza vaccination clinic.

OFF-SITE CLINICS: Contact your local public health office, doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about receiving the seasonal influenza vaccine.

### **Where can I get more advice on influenza vaccination?**

Contact your local public health office, doctor, nurse, or pharmacist. You can also read more about influenza vaccination at [immunize.ca](https://immunize.ca).

- <sup>i</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza and Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2020–2021. Last modified January 28, 2021. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/canadian-immunization-guide-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2020-2021.html#11>
- <sup>ii</sup> Immunize Canada. Read. Learn. Understand. Lower Your Flu Risk. Accessed May 19, 2021. Available at: [https://immunize.ca/sites/default/files/Resource%20and%20Product%20Uploads%20\(PDFs\)/Campaigns/Influenza/2020-2021/read-learn-understand-lower-your-flu-risk\\_web\\_e.pdf](https://immunize.ca/sites/default/files/Resource%20and%20Product%20Uploads%20(PDFs)/Campaigns/Influenza/2020-2021/read-learn-understand-lower-your-flu-risk_web_e.pdf)
- <sup>iii</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza and Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2020–2021. Last modified January 28, 2021. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/canadian-immunization-guide-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2020-2021.html#11>
- <sup>iv</sup> Immunize Canada. Influenza Immunization Questions and Answers. Accessed May 26, 2021. Available at: [https://immunize.ca/sites/default/files/Resource%20and%20Product%20Uploads%20\(PDFs\)/Campaigns/Influenza/2017-2018/influenza\\_qa\\_2018\\_web\\_e.pdf](https://immunize.ca/sites/default/files/Resource%20and%20Product%20Uploads%20(PDFs)/Campaigns/Influenza/2017-2018/influenza_qa_2018_web_e.pdf)
- <sup>v</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. Stop the Spread of the Flu and COVID-19. Last modified November 6, 2020. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/stop-spread-flu-poster.html>
- <sup>vi</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Similarities and Differences Between Flu and COVID-19. Last modified August 31, 2020. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>
- <sup>vii</sup> Immunize Canada. Influenza Immunization Questions and Answers. Accessed May 26, 2021. Available at: [https://immunize.ca/sites/default/files/Resource%20and%20Product%20Uploads%20\(PDFs\)/Campaigns/Influenza/2017-2018/influenza\\_qa\\_2018\\_web\\_e.pdf](https://immunize.ca/sites/default/files/Resource%20and%20Product%20Uploads%20(PDFs)/Campaigns/Influenza/2017-2018/influenza_qa_2018_web_e.pdf) Immunize Canada. Read. Learn. Understand. Lower Your Flu Risk.
- <sup>ix</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. Flu (influenza): Prevention and Risks. Last modified October 19, 2020. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza/prevention-risks.html>
- <sup>x</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xi</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada. Plan to Get Your Flu Shot. Last modified October 14, 2020. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/plan-your-flu-shot.html>
- <sup>xii</sup> Immunize Canada. Influenza Immunization Questions and Answers. Accessed May 26, 2021. Available at: [https://immunize.ca/sites/default/files/Resource%20and%20Product%20Uploads%20\(PDFs\)/Campaigns/Influenza/2017-2018/influenza\\_qa\\_2018\\_web\\_e.pdf](https://immunize.ca/sites/default/files/Resource%20and%20Product%20Uploads%20(PDFs)/Campaigns/Influenza/2017-2018/influenza_qa_2018_web_e.pdf)
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xix</sup> Ibid.