

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 women and pregnant people
- people in or from First Nations, Inuit, or Métis communities – as a result of intersecting determinants of health rooted in historic and ongoing colonization and systemic racism
- adults 65 years of age or older
- residents of nursing homes or other chronic-care facilities
- people with chronic medical conditions

For more information on groups who are at increased risk for severe influenza, please see the [Canadian Immunization Guide chapter on influenza](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/national-advisory-committee-immunization-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccines-2025-2026.html).

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). (2025.) Statement on seasonal influenza vaccines for 2025-2026. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/national-advisory-committee-immunization-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccines-2025-2026.html>

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2025.) Flu (influenza): Get your flu vaccine (flu shot). <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza/get-your-flu-shot.html>