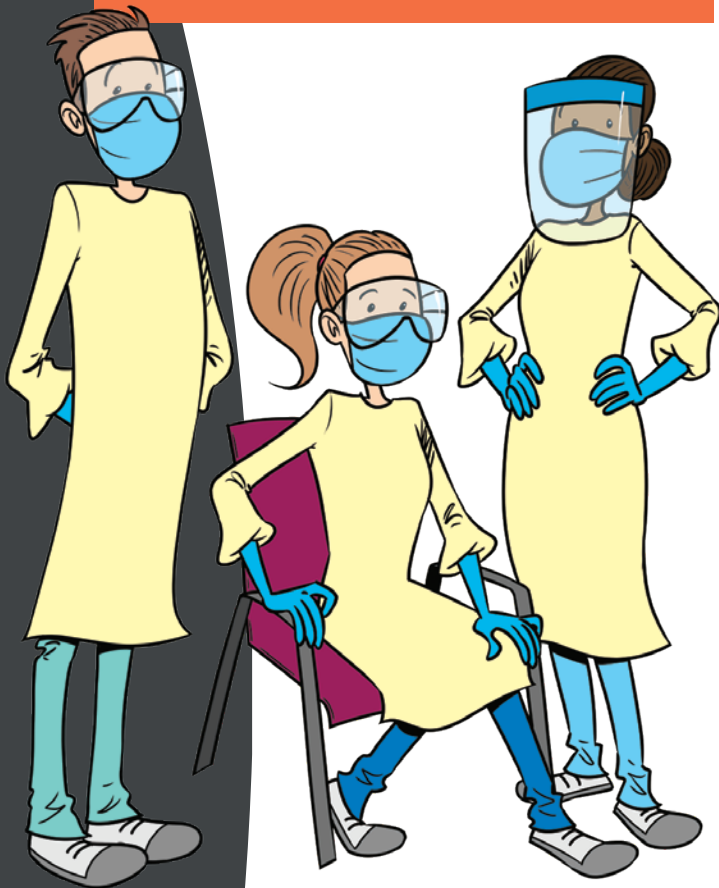




HEALTHCARE WORKERS



Questions & Answers: the flu and the flu shot

The symptoms of the flu and its complications (leading to hospitalizations and deaths) vary depending on an individual's age, health, and the specific flu strains circulating each year. Here are answers to questions you as a healthcare worker may be asking about the flu and the flu vaccine.

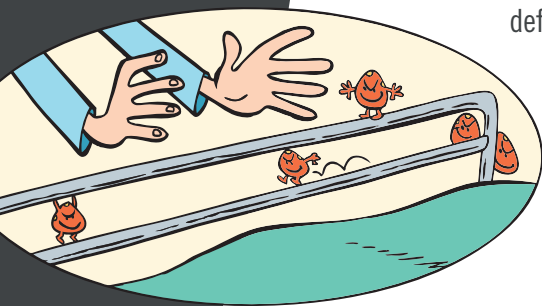


I'm a healthcare worker, do I need to get a flu shot?

Experts recommend that all healthcare workers get a flu shot. In terms of the flu shot, a healthcare worker is defined as anyone who provides care to or is in close contact with high-risk individuals as defined by the Protocole d'immunisation du Québec (PIQ), whether in a hospital, long-term care centre, medical or dental clinic, CLSC or in any other residential or care-providing environment. However, healthcare workers who provide direct services to patients in hospitals and long-term care facilities have priority for the flu shot.

For the definition of a healthcare worker, see the PIQ

msss.gouv.qc.ca



COVID-19

NOW, MORE THAN EVER, IT'S IMPORTANT TO GET A FLU SHOT. THIS PREVENTIVE MEASURE DECREASES THE RISK OF HOSPITALIZATION AND HELPS PROTECT THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM, YOUR FAMILY AND PEOPLE AT RISK.

What are the differences between the flu and a cold?

SYMPTOMS	FLU	COLD
Fever	Common Temperature of 38°C to 40°C (100.4°F to 104°F) Sudden onset	None or mild
Cough	Common Sudden onset	Common Mild or moderate
Headache	Common Sometimes severe	Rare
Aches and pains	Common Sometimes severe	Rare Mild
Fatigue	Common Severe Lasts a few days, sometimes longer	Common Mild
Nausea and vomiting	Rare in adults More common in children Often with diarrhea and abdominal pain in children	Rare Mild
Runny or stuffy nose	Rare, more common in children	Common
Sneezing	Rare	Common
Sore throat	Common	Common

Source: Government of Quebec, 2020

The symptoms of COVID-19 are the same as for the flu. Symptoms may range from very mild to very severe. However, one of the characteristic symptoms of COVID-19 is the loss of taste and smell with no nasal congestion.

Who is at a high risk of complications?

The flu is a viral infection that spreads easily from person to person. It's a contagious disease that is surely present in your environment. If you're in good health, you may fight off the flu but you may also spread the virus and contaminate those around you and the clients your facility serves.

Among those you come into contact with, some have a higher risk of complications:

- People of any age suffering from chronic illnesses (such as heart or lung problems, diabetes, cancer, compromised immune system, transplant patients, etc.)
- Residents of any age in nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- People over the age of 75



A good many of the individuals who use healthcare services in institutions are in these high-risk groups.

Why not just give every patient a flu shot?

Even if all at-risk individuals were given a flu shot, the most effective vaccine would only protect 60% of them. Several factors affect the vaccine's effectiveness: age, the health of the recipient's immune system, and how close the flu strains in the vaccine match those that are actually circulating. For patients with a high risk of complications, the flu vaccine mainly decreases the risk of hospitalization or death.

Plus, since some people can't get the shot because of contraindications and others never get the information about it or a recommendation to get the shot, it would be hard to vaccinate everyone who is at risk.

It is still recommended that healthcare workers get the flu shot, especially if you have many contacts with individuals who have a high risk of complications. The priority is to give the shot to healthcare workers who provide direct services to patients in hospitals and long-term care centres.

The scientific evidence showing that vaccinating healthcare workers indirectly reduces patient illness and death is of low quality. However, it is true that the flu shot prevents transmission to patients and makes it easier to control flu outbreaks by reducing case numbers.

Are there any side effects to getting the flu shot?

The flu vaccine is safe. However, you might experience the following reactions.

FREQUENCY	POSSIBLE REACTIONS TO THE FLU SHOT	WHAT TO DO
In most cases (more than 50% of people)	Pain at injection site	
Very often (less than 50% of people)	Redness and swelling at the injection site / Muscle pain, joint pain, headache, fatigue / Loss of appetite, drowsiness (difficulty staying awake), irritability	Apply a cold compress to the injection site
Often (less than 10% of people)	Bruising or itching at injection site / Fever, chills and discomfort, particularly in people receiving the flu vaccine for the first time / Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach ache / Red eyes, sore throat, coughing, difficulty breathing (the oculo-respiratory syndrome (ORS))	Take a medication for fever or discomfort as needed
Sometimes (less than 1% of people)	Swelling of the face: this reaction is also part of ORS / Reddening of the skin / Dizziness / Swollen glands	See a doctor depending on the severity of the symptoms
Rarely (less than 1 person in 1000)	Seizures / Numbness, neuralgia (pain along a nerve)	

There may also be a very low risk of developing Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) after receiving a flu shot. The risk is about one case per million adults vaccinated. The syndrome causes progressive but reversible paralysis, which can sometimes leave permanent effects. The cause of GBS is unknown. In most cases, GBS occurs following infection (including the flu) of the intestines or lungs, mainly among young adults and people over the age of 60.

Source: msss.gouv.qc.ca

Are there other ways to protect high-risk people from getting the flu or another respiratory infection?

It's vital that respiratory infection prevention and control (IPC) measures be applied in our institutions. These measures include the following:

- **Don't go to work if you have flu symptoms (e.g., cough, fever). Contact your workplace health, safety and wellness department to find out when you can go back to work.**
- **Always practice basic prevention such as hand hygiene and wearing a mask when in direct contact with patients who have symptoms of a respiratory infection.**
- **Carefully follow all the infection prevention measures recommended by the facility.**



Should I get a flu shot every year?

Nearly every year a vaccine is produced to fight the current influenza strains and provide the best possible protection against the viruses that will be circulating. In Québec, the injectable vaccine for adults is composed of the 3 or 4 virus strains most likely to be present in the northern hemisphere. The strains are selected by the World Health Organization. This means that the flu shot offered this year may be different than last year's shot.

That's why it's recommended that people at a high risk for complications, and healthcare workers (especially those who provide direct care to patients), get a flu shot every year, whether they had one the year before or not.



Where can I get my flu shot?

Healthcare workers are entitled to a free flu shot, often at their place of work.

Check with your Health Department for details. On the other hand, you can also get the shot at your local CLSC. If you do, make sure the information is entered in your vaccination record and tell your Health Department so that your vaccination record is kept up-to-date.

FOR MORE INFO

Contact the Infection Prevention & Control Department or Health Department at your facility. You can also go to the ASSTSAS website (asstsas.qc.ca) or the Quebec.ca/vaccingrippe website.

This fact sheet was produced in collaboration with the Direction générale adjointe de la protection de la santé publique of the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS) and the Institut national de santé publique du Québec.