

ARE YOU
**MYTH-
INFORMED**
ABOUT THE FLU VACCINE?



HERE ARE THE FACTS YOUR
HEALTHCARE PROVIDER WANTS
YOU TO KNOW.

SEPARATING THE FACTS FROM FICTION

Each year, the influenza virus (the flu) affects millions of Canadians. Getting your annual flu vaccine helps prevent the flu and reduces the risk of spreading it to those around you.

In recent years, however, an increasing volume of conflicting information about the flu and the flu vaccine has surfaced online and in various other mediums. This information is then passed on through word-of-mouth, adding to the confusion.

This booklet will help debunk the most common myths about the flu vaccine, so that you can make an informed decision about your health and the health of your family.



**REMEMBER TO
TRUST YOUR HEALTH
TO THE EXPERTS.**

Your healthcare provider—doctor, nurse, or pharmacist—is the best source of information regarding the flu vaccine.

MYTH

THE FLU ISN'T THAT SERIOUS.
THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY.

FACT

Each year in Canada, about 3,500 people die from the flu or complications, such as pneumonia. The flu also leads to approximately 12,000 hospitalizations per year.¹

In some people considered to be 'high risk', the flu can lead to other serious health concerns, and it is especially important for these people to be vaccinated.

'High risk' groups include:¹

- Children 59 months of age and younger
- Adults aged 65 years and older
- Pregnant women
- Adults and children with underlying health conditions (e.g. diabetes, cardiac or pulmonary disorders)

Vaccination is also strongly recommended for anyone capable of spreading the flu to those considered to be "high risk". This includes healthcare workers, caregivers, and household members.



SEPARATING THE FACTS FROM FICTION

MYTH

THE FLU VACCINE DOESN'T WORK.

FACT

Vaccination helps prevent the flu and reduces the risk of spreading it to those around you. It is true that some people who have been vaccinated get sick, and this leads to the idea that vaccines don't work. Because each person is different, about 10 to 15% of people vaccinated will not develop immunity to the flu.

However, vaccination can help reduce the severity of the flu in these people.^{1,2,3}



MYTH

**YOU DON'T NEED THE FLU SHOT
IF YOU NEVER GET SICK.**

FACT

By getting the flu vaccine, you are not only helping protect yourself from the virus, but others around you as well. Each year, up to 1 in 4 Canadians are infected with the flu. This is why Canadian public health agencies encourage everyone over six months of age (who do not have a contraindication) to get a flu shot.¹ Even though you may be healthy, you could be carrying the flu virus in your body, which means you can spread it to others. By getting the flu shot, you are helping to protect not only your own health, but the health of family members, friends, and coworkers too.

MYTH

THE FLU SHOT CAN GIVE YOU THE FLU.

FACT

The flu shot cannot give you the flu. The vaccine contains dead influenza viruses and they cannot cause infection.²

SEPARATING THE FACTS FROM FICTION

MYTH

THE FLU VACCINE DOESN'T WORK BECAUSE OF THE DIFFERENT STRAINS CIRCULATING EACH YEAR.

FACT

Today, 4-strain vaccines can help protect you against four of the flu strains that may be circulating. So your risk of getting the flu or passing it along to others is further reduced.⁴

MYTH

GETTING THE FLU SHOT IS INCONVENIENT.

FACT

There are many convenient ways to get your flu vaccine. Each flu season numerous flu shot clinics open across the country. You can also arrange to have a clinic at your workplace, or you can make an appointment with your healthcare provider. For more information, contact your local Public Health Services Office.

MYTH

A FLU SHOT ISN'T NEEDED EVERY YEAR.



FACT

It is important to get vaccinated every year. Flu viruses can change from year to year, so every single year researchers have to develop a new flu vaccine. By getting the flu shot every year, you can help protect yourself from the strains of the flu virus that are expected to circulate during that particular flu season.¹

SEPARATING THE FACTS FROM FICTION

MYTH

THE FLU VACCINE OFTEN CAUSES SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS.

FACT

The benefits of getting the flu shot far outweigh the risks. Like all medicine, there is a risk of side effects associated with the flu vaccine, but severe reactions are very rare. In fact, the risks of serious complications from the flu are far greater.



The most common side effect from the flu vaccine is soreness at the site of injection. Other possible but less common side effects, such as fever, fatigue, and muscle aches are usually mild.

Severe allergic reactions to flu shots are rare. Another very rare but possible side effect of the flu shot is Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS). Your chance of developing GBS as a result of the flu shot is one in a million. Infection with the flu itself can also cause GBS.^{1,3}

MYTH

**THE FLU VACCINE IS DANGEROUS
BECAUSE IT CONTAINS MERCURY.**

FACT

Years of careful, detailed research into the safety of ANY vaccine is done before its widespread use.

One ingredient of the flu vaccine, a preservative called thimerosal, has received some negative attention because it contains a trace amount of mercury. The amount of mercury found in thimerosal is extremely small, does not build up in the body, and is much less toxic than other forms of mercury. Canadian public health specialists have reviewed the latest science and concluded that there is no legitimate safety reason to avoid the use of the flu vaccine.³

SEPARATING THE FACTS FROM FICTION

MYTH

IT'S TOO LATE TO GET THE FLU SHOT NOW IF THE FLU SEASON IS ALMOST OVER.

FACT

The flu shot can help protect you at any point during the flu season. The Canadian flu season typically lasts from November to April. The best time to get your flu vaccine is in the fall between October and December, because it usually takes about two weeks before the vaccine gives you full protection. However, the flu shot can still help protect you even if you get it later in the flu season.^{1,5}

MYTH

ACCORDING TO ONLINE SOURCES, THE FLU SHOT CAN'T BE TRUSTED.

FACT

Healthcare professionals who are licensed in Canada are the best source of information regarding the flu vaccine. While accurate vaccine information is found online, there is also a lot of inaccurate information. When reading information online, it's important to ensure the source is trustworthy. It's also important to remember that online health information should not be considered health advice, and it does not replace a visit to your healthcare professional.

TIPS ON IDENTIFYING TRUSTWORTHY SOURCES:²

- Author/organization's name is clearly stated
- Author/organization's perspective clearly stated
- Author/organization is reputable
- Solid evidence is provided (i.e., scientific studies)
- Lots of detail and original content
- Information is up-to-date
- Revision date is clearly marked
- Author's interest in developing/sharing information is clearly stated
- No bias/conflict of interest
- Presents a balanced perspective (both risks and benefits)
- The site offers a clear statement that health information should not be taken as health advice or a substitute for visiting a health professional



Pass this guide along to friends or family members so that they can make an informed decision about their health.

The flu vaccine may not be suitable for everyone and side effects may occur. Vaccination may not protect all individuals and 100% protection cannot be guaranteed. Flu vaccines are not intended to treat the flu or its complications. Ask your healthcare provider if vaccination is suitable for you.

REMEMBER TO TRUST YOUR HEALTH TO THE EXPERTS.



TALK TO YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER
ABOUT THE FLU VACCINE TODAY.

References: 1. HealthyCanadians (Government of Canada). Available at: <http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/disease-maladie/flu-grippe/index-eng.php>. 2. Public Health Agency of Canada. Young Adults and the H1N1 Flu Vaccine – Vaccine Myths and Facts. Available at www.sunrisehealthregion.sk.ca/files/PHAC%20Young%20Adults%20and%20the%20H1N1%20Vaccine%20fact%20sheet.pdf. 3. Health Canada. Healthy Living – It's your health. 2009. 4. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Public Health Division. Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccines: For individuals 6 months through 17 years of age. Available at www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/flu/uiip/docs/flu_uiip_QIV_factsheet_2015-16_en.pdf. 5. Public Health Agency of Canada. Influenza Immunization - "the flu shot".