

STAYING SAFE THIS SEASON

Canada's cold, flu, and respiratory virus season typically runs from fall through winter. Having the flu, a cold or COVID can lead to mild symptoms like fatigue, but in some cases, it can lead to severe complications or death. Among those eligible for vaccination, some people are at higher risk for complications or hospitalization due to the flu or COVID-19. Those people include individuals 65+, living in a care facility, young children, people with other co-morbidity or chronic health conditions and marginalized communities.

Vaccination is a simple, safe, and effective way of protecting the body against harmful diseases. Everyone aged six months and older is eligible to receive flu, and you are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine if it has been more than six months since your last vaccine or confirmed infection. There is no need to wait between the two vaccines. Anyone six months of age and older can get any seasonal influenza vaccine simultaneously, before or after any other vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, if you prefer. The COVID-19 vaccine protects against severe infection and against long-term COVID-19, which is when symptoms last for weeks or months. Vaccination is safe for pregnant or breastfeeding women, seniors, and anyone with a health condition, such as heart or lung problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, an auto-immune condition, or a weak immune system. People taking treatments or with conditions that weaken their immune system should speak to their healthcare provider about when to get each dose for the best immune response. You can book a call with the VaxFacts+ Doctor to answer your specific questions: <https://www.shn.ca/vaxfacts/>

There are daily habits we can all do to stay safe and protect others this fall. It would help if you regularly wash your hands before eating and preparing food, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Avoid touching your eyes and covering any coughs or sneezes. Wear a mask in indoor public spaces with other people, such as transit or busy stores.

If you feel unwell, you should stay home to reduce the spread of any illness. If you have any respiratory symptoms, an at-home Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) kit can help a physician advise on care plans and determine if you need to delay your next vaccine.

It is strongly recommended that every eligible person stay up-to-date with COVID-19 vaccinations. Children 6 months to 4 years should complete a primary series; everyone five years and older should complete a primary series and get a booster dose on or after September 1, 2022. The booster dose is given six months after the last COVID-19 vaccine or a COVID-19 infection. Anyone who needs to get a booster after September 1 is still eligible for a booster this spring.

If we all do our part, we can reduce the spread of influenza and Covid-19 this year.