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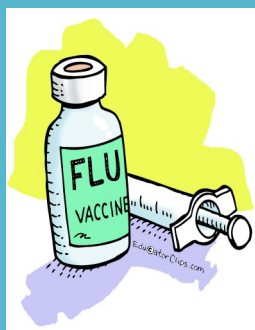
Infection Prevention & Control

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Influenza 2024-25 Season

Influenza is a respiratory infection caused by the influenza A and B viruses in humans and can cause mild to severe illness, including hospitalization or death. Certain populations, such as young children, older adults and those with chronic health conditions, are at higher risk for serious influenza complications such as viral pneumonia, secondary bacterial pneumonia and the worsening of underlying medical conditions.

Trivalent influenza vaccines for use in 2024-25 northern hemisphere influenza season contain the following strains: an A/Victoria/4897/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus; an A/Thailand/8/2022 (H3N2)-like virus; and a B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus. **Quadrivalent** egg- or cell culture-based or recombinant vaccines include the B/Yamagata lineage component: a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

Infectious Agent

- There are 2 main types of influenza viruses that cause seasonal epidemics in humans: A and B.
- Influenza A viruses are classified into subtypes.
- Influenza B viruses have evolved into 2 distinct lineages since the mid-1980s.
- Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a reduction in seasonal influenza virus diversity has been observed globally. In particular, there have been no confirmed naturally occurring cases of B/Yamagata influenza lineage viruses since March 2020.
- Over time, variation of strains occur within an influenza A subtype or a B lineage. The possibility of variation, which may occur in 1 or more influenza virus strains, requires the formulation of seasonal influenza vaccines be re-evaluated annually, with 1 or more vaccine strains changing in most seasons.

Transmission

- Influenza is primarily transmitted by aerosols and droplets spread through coughing or sneezing, and through direct or indirect contact with respiratory secretions.
- The incubation period of seasonal influenza is usually about 2 days, but can range from 1 to 4 days. Adults may be able to spread influenza to others from 1 day before symptom onset to approximately 5 days after symptoms start. Children and people with weakened immune systems may be infectious longer.

Risk Factors

- The people at greatest risk of influenza-related complications are adults and children with chronic health conditions; residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities; adults 65 years of age and older; children 0 to 59 months of age; pregnant individuals; and Indigenous Peoples.

Seasonal and Temporal Patterns

- Influenza activity in Canada is usually low in the late spring and summer, begins to increase over the fall and peaks in the winter months. Influenza season in Canada usually begins in December and lasts 12 to 16 weeks; but the season can start as early as October or as late as February and last for as long as 20 weeks. One (1) or more peaks may occur during a season. Although 1 strain often predominates, more than 1 influenza strain typically circulates each season.

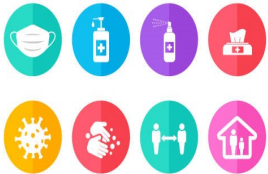
Spectrum of Illness

- Classically, symptoms of influenza include the sudden onset of fever, cough and muscle aches. Other common symptoms include headache, chills, loss of appetite, fatigue and sore throat. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur, especially in children; however, influenza can cause a range of symptoms, from asymptomatic infection through mild acute respiratory illness (a "cold") to severe influenza pneumonia. Most people will recover within a week or 10 days.

As of July 2024, multiple outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) A(H5N1) have occurred in poultry and wild birds in Canada and the United States (US), with spillover events in dairy cattle in the US. This virus has also spread to numerous other mammals. In the US, 9 humans have acquired mild influenza A(H5Nx) infections from cows and poultry to date in 2024.

The 2023-24 Influenza Season in Alberta

The 2023-24 Alberta Influenza Immunization Program ended on Sunday, March 31, 2024. Over the course of the 2023-24 influenza season, over 1.13 million Albertans were immunized, representing an overall influenza immunization rate of 25 per cent (25%).



Preventing Influenza

The single best way to reduce the risk of seasonal flu and its potentially serious complications is to get vaccinated each year, but preventive actions like avoiding people who are sick, covering your cough and washing your hands frequently can also help stop the spread of germs and prevent respiratory illnesses like flu. Prevention strategies also can include taking steps for cleaner air and hygiene practices like cleaning frequently touched surfaces.

The tips and resources below will help you learn about actions you can take to protect yourself and others from the flu and ways to help stop the spread of germs:

1. **Avoid close contact.** Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too. Putting physical distance between yourself and others can help lower the risk of spreading a respiratory virus.
2. **Stay home when you are sick.** If possible, stay home from work, school and errands when you are sick. You can go back to your normal activities when, for at least 24 hours, two criteria are met: Your symptoms are getting better overall; **and** you have not had a fever (and are not using fever-reducing medication).
3. **Cover your mouth and nose.** Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. Flu viruses are thought to spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. Wearing a mask is an additional prevention strategy that you can choose to do to further protect yourself and others. When worn by a person with an infection, masks reduce the spread of the virus to others. Masks can also protect wearers from breathing in infectious particles from people around them.
4. **Clean your hands.** Washing your hands thoroughly and often will help protect you from germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
5. **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
6. **Take steps for cleaner air.** You can improve air quality by bringing in fresh outside air, purifying indoor air or gathering outdoors. Cleaner air can reduce the risk of exposure to viruses.
7. **Practice good hygiene and other healthy habits.** Cleaning frequently touched surfaces, such as countertops, handrails, and doorknobs regularly can help prevent the spread of some illnesses. Also, get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.

Preventing the Flu at Work and School

At School:

- Find out about plans your child's school, childcare program and/or college has if an outbreak of flu or another illness occurs and whether flu vaccinations are offered on-site.
- Ask your child's school, childcare program and/or college about whether they routinely clean frequently touched objects and surfaces and whether they have a good supply of tissues, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rubs and disposable wipes on-site.
- Also ask your child's school, childcare program and/or college about whether they take steps for cleaner air.
- Ask how sick students and staff are separated from others, who will care for them until they can go home and about the absentee policy for sick students and staff.

At Work:

- Find out about your employer's plans if an outbreak of flu or another illness occurs and whether flu vaccinations are offered on-site.
- Routinely clean frequently touched objects and surfaces, including doorknobs, keyboards and phones to help remove germs.
- Make sure your workplace has an adequate supply of tissues, soap, paper towels, alcohol-based hand rubs and disposable wipes.
- Train others on how to do your job so they can cover for you in case you or a family member gets sick and you have to stay home.
- If you begin to feel sick while at work, go home as soon as possible.