



Department of Family Medicine
Queen's Family Health Team

The Flu:

Nothing to Sniff At

What is the flu?

The flu is a highly contagious virus that causes respiratory infections that affect the nose, throat and lungs. The flu season usually lasts from November to April. People are usually sick for one week, but in some cases, especially in infants and young children, pregnant women, people with chronic diseases, (such as diabetes and asthma) and the elderly, the flu can lead to serious complications such as pneumonia.

How do I know if I have the flu or a cold?

It can be difficult to tell the difference. This KFL&A Public Health chart outlines the difference between the two.

Symptom	Influenza	Cold
Fever	Usual, may be high sudden onset, may last 3 to 4 days	Rare
Headache	Usual, can be severe	Rare
Chest discomfort, coughing	Usual, can become severe	Sometimes, mild to moderate
General aches and pains	Usual, often severe	Sometimes, mild
Extreme fatigue	Usual early onset, can be severe	Unusual
Weakness	Usual, severe, may last 2 to 3 weeks or more	Sometimes, mild
Runny, stuffy nose	Common	Common
Sneezing	Sometimes	Common
Sore throat	Common	Common
Complications	Can lead to pneumonia, can worsen a current chronic condition, can be life-threatening	Can lead to sinus congestion or earache

What can I do to avoid the flu?

You are a valuable ally in the fight against the flu. There are many things you can do.

1. Get the flu shot. It not only protects you, it protects those around you as well.
2. Wash your hands often.
3. Cough and sneeze into your arm, not your hands. Hands touch everything and infections spread quickly through touch.
4. Clean and disinfect common surfaces often. These include door knobs/handles, light switches, telephones, kitchen and bathroom counters, computer keyboards, etc. Some viruses and bacteria can live on surfaces for up to 48 hours.
5. If you get sick, stay home. Going to work or school can spread the illness to those you encounter. If you require medical attention, call your health care provider. When you arrive for your appointment, the receptionist may ask you to wear a mask. This is an important measure that can prevent the spread of the illness.
6. Stay healthy. Regular physical activity and healthy eating are an excellent defence against illness.

Did you know?

Millions of Canadians are infected with the flu every year. It is believed that more than 2,000 Canadians, mostly seniors, children, and those with chronic health problems die each year from the flu. The flu shot can prevent flu illness in up to 70 to 90 per cent of healthy children and adults. (fightflu.ca)

I have asthma. Should I get a flu shot?

Yes. Almost everyone should get a flu shot. It will protect you from the virus, but it will also protect your family, your friends and your community. If you do not get the flu, you cannot pass it on to others.

People who should not get the flu shot are:

- 1) Infants under six months of age
- 2) Anyone who is really ill with a fever

- 3) Anyone who has developed the Guillain-Barre Syndrome or Oculorespiratory Syndrome within eight weeks after vaccination. (Speak to your health-care provider.)

Please note: Anyone with allergies to Thimerosal and/or Neomycin/Kanamycin should advise their health care provider, as accommodations can be made.

Can I get the flu from the flu shot?

No! The flu shot does not contain any live viruses so you cannot get the flu from the vaccine. If you become ill following the vaccine, it is possible that you were already exposed to a cold or the flu and would have been sick regardless of the shot.

Where should I go to get the flu shot?

The flu shot will be available from a number of locations:

- 1) Queen's Family Health Team (QFHT): flu shot information and clinic dates are posted on the QFHT website. Visit qfht.ca.
- 2) KFL&A Public Health: Each year, the nurses from KFL&A Public Health offer the vaccine in a number of locations. Schedules are posted at kflaph.ca.
- 3) Many pharmacists now provide the vaccine. Call your pharmacy to see if it will be providing the shot to its patients.

And remember, if you get the flu shot elsewhere, let us know so that we can update your file.