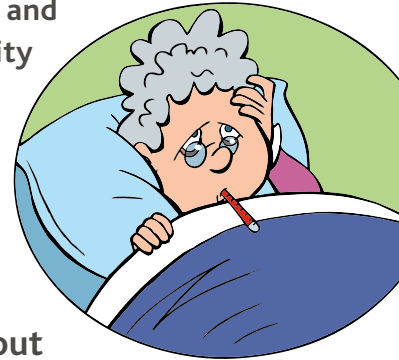




The flu can be a disaster!

GET YOUR FLU SHOT TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

No one is immune to the flu virus. Fortunately, you can avoid getting sick by having a flu shot. In elderly people, a flu shot can reduce the seriousness of the illness and its complications by up to 60%, and the mortality rate by up to 80%.



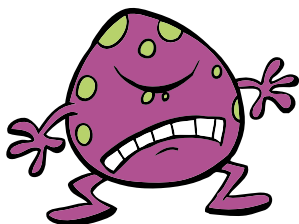
Flu symptoms include sudden fever, dry cough, aching muscles and generalized discomfort that lasts five to seven days.

DO YOU NEED CONVINCING?

There are lots of rumours going around about seasonal flu and flu shots for health care workers. Let's debunk some of the most common myths.

"The flu is just a bad cold!"

Flu is a serious and potentially fatal disease. It attacks the nose, throat and lungs and can lead to pneumonia. Flu kills more Quebecers than breast cancer and just as many as diabetes. Flu symptoms include sudden fever, dry cough, aching muscles and generalized discomfort that lasts five to seven days. The cough may last two weeks, while fatigue may persist for up to a month.



The difference between flu and cold symptoms

SYMPTOMS	SEASONAL FLU	COLD
Fever	→ Common: between 38 and 40°C; sudden onset; lasts 2-5 days	→ Rare
Headache	→ Common; may be severe	→ Rare
Sore, aching muscles	→ Common; may be severe	→ Rare
Fatigue	→ Intense; lasts a few days or longer	→ Light
Nausea and vomiting	→ Common, particularly in children under age 6	→ Rare
Runny or stuffy nose	→ Rare	→ Common
Sneezing	→ Rare	→ Common
Sore throat	→ Rare	→ Common
Chest pain	→ Common; may be severe	→ At times, mild to moderate
Cough	→ Common; lasts 1 week	→ Common, mild to moderate

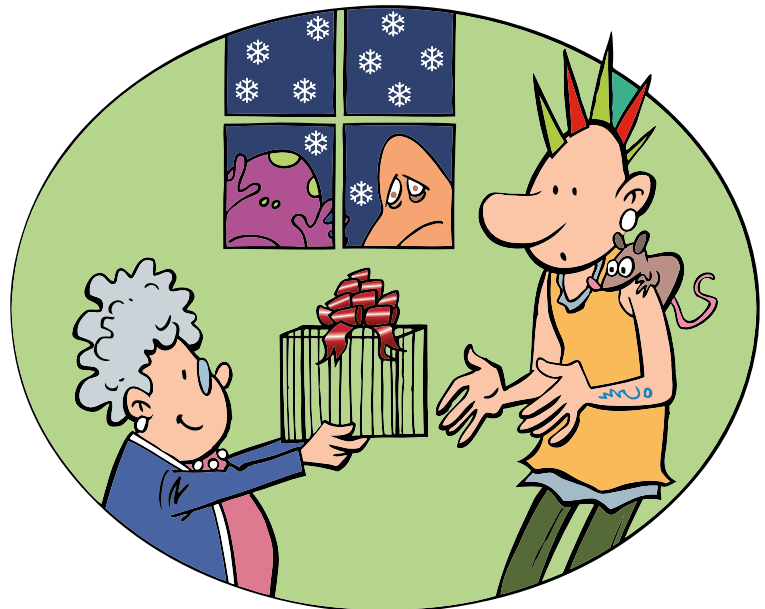
SOURCE: MSSS

“I’m healthy, I have a strong immune system, and I’ve never caught the flu. The flu shot is only for old, sick people.”

The flu is an acute viral infection that spreads easily from person to person. This contagious disease exists within your institution. If you’re healthy, you may be able to fight it off if you come in contact with the virus. Unfortunately, you may carry the virus home with you and contaminate your family and friends, even if you don’t come down with it yourself. The flu may be more serious for:

- elderly people;
- people suffering from a chronic disease (heart or lung disease, diabetes, cancer, immune system problems, etc.);
- children under the age of 2.

Patients in health care institutions are also at risk.



So are people like your aunt, recovering from breast cancer, your grandmother who is still sharp as a tack at age 85, the new baby in the family whom you’ll be seeing for the first time this Christmas, your diabetic brother-in-law and your asthmatic spouse. With Christmas just around the corner, is this really the gift you want to give them?



"If you're asking employees to be vaccinated to protect patients, why not just vaccinate all the patients?"

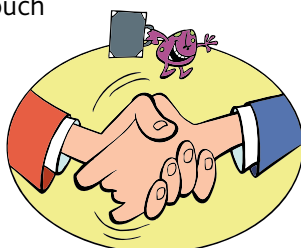
In Québec, 87% of residents in long-term care facilities receive a seasonal flu shot each year, which is very close to the goal of 90%. However, the vaccine is only 30 to 40% effective for these individuals, whereas it is 70 to 90% effective for young, healthy people.

Studies have shown that when the vaccination rate among health care workers is high, there is less nosocomial flu transmission among patients in the institution. Although having a seasonal flu shot is voluntary for health care workers, it is highly recommended to avoid spreading the virus to vulnerable patients.

"I don't work with patients directly, so I don't need to be vaccinated."

Seasonal flu is a contagious disease spread mainly by droplets (from coughing, talking or sneezing), by direct contact (kissing), and by indirect contact (shaking a contaminated hand, and then, touching the mucous membranes of your face). It can also be spread by airborne microparticles generated during certain medical procedures, which can then be inhaled.

The flu virus can survive for 24 to 48 hours in the environment. If a contaminated person sneezes into his hand, then presses the elevator button, turns a door handle, or uses the telephone, and then you touch these contaminated objects, you in turn can carry the virus and give it to someone else. The flu virus



is contagious for 24 to 48 hours before the symptoms appear and remains contagious for five to ten days after the onset of the disease. It is therefore easy to unknowingly spread the flu. The seasonal flu vaccine is fully effective after two weeks and will protect you for a year.

"I know someone who got sick after having a flu shot."

You can't catch flu from a flu shot, because the vaccine has not contained live flu virus since 1998. On the other hand, there are many other viruses that produce flu-like symptoms. The vaccination season also coincides with the cold season, so it's very likely that your friend caught something other than the flu, like a cold or a different kind of virus, not covered by the vaccine.

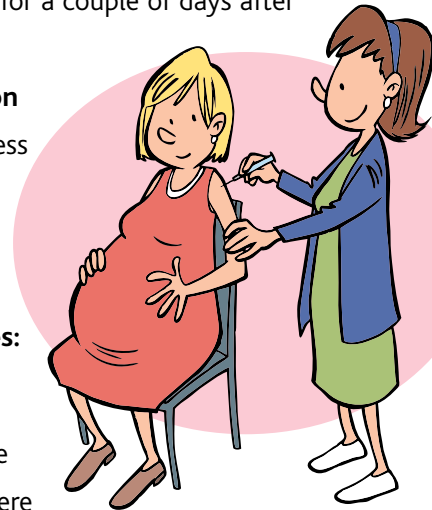
"I'm afraid of the potential side effects of the flu shot."

The flu vaccine is safe and effective. You may, however, experience some side effects for a couple of days after receiving the shot:

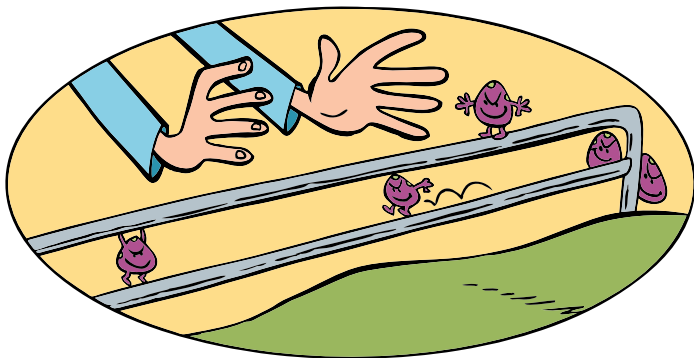
- **some pain at the injection site**, with or without redness and swelling: about one person in three;
- **fever, generalized discomfort and sore muscles**: about one person in four.

These side effects are quite minor. They should not interfere with your daily activities and may be relieved by taking acetaminophen. While they usually last a maximum of 24 hours, the flu will knock you out for at least a week!

- **Allergies**: some people, who are hypersensitive to some of the products found in the vaccine (eggs, chicken protein, preservatives) could have an allergic reaction within minutes of the injection, which is why you are asked not to leave for 15 minutes after being vaccinated.



- **Oculorespiratory syndrome (ORS):** some people developed ORS during the 2000-2001 flu season: facial swelling, red eyes and respiratory symptoms. This reaction occurred within 24 hours of the vaccination. The number of cases has dropped since 2000. In fact, only nine cases of ORS were recorded in Québec in 2003, while a 2005 Canadian report showed a rate of 1.9 cases per 100,000 doses of vaccine.
- **Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS):** since 1976, studies have not shown a link between the flu vaccination and GBS.
- **Pregnancy:** the flu vaccine is safe for pregnant women and for women who are planning to become pregnant. In fact, it is even recommended for the protection of unborn children, because babies cannot be vaccinated before the age of six months.
- **Autism:** studies have shown that there is no link between autism and the thimerosal found in flu vaccines.



"I'm afraid that the vaccination will deplete my immune system."

Your body is in contact with millions of bacteria every day, so your immune system is always working to protect you. Your immune system needs constant stimulation to stay on guard, so it will have no difficulty handling the small number of antigens in the vaccine.

"I don't have time for a flu shot."

A flu outbreak among patients and staff will take up a lot more of your time than the 15 minutes you spend getting your flu shot! Health care sector workers are entitled to free seasonal flu shots in the workplace. Or if you prefer, you can have your shot at your doctor's office or at the CLSC and, don't forget to have your vaccine records updated to avoid unnecessary reminders.

"What? Another flu shot? I had one last year and the 2011-2012 vaccine is identical to last year's!"

A number of studies have shown that the immunity produced by a flu shot weakens over time. This decline in protection is affected by several factors: the person's age and general health status, the particular antigen used in the vaccine, etc. Experts believe that the immunity produced by the 2010-2011 flu shot has already declined in most people. Is it still enough? Impossible to say for sure. That's why it's recommended that everyone over the age of 6 months get a flu shot this season, regardless of whether or not they had one last year.



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