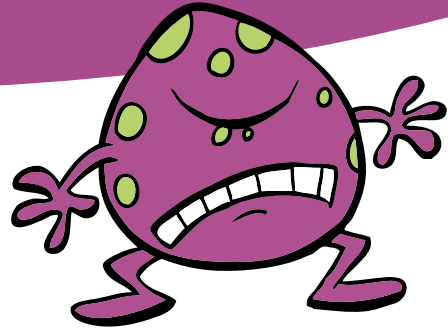




Don't let the flu crash your party!



**GET YOUR
FLU SHOT
TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS**

Seasonal flu is a serious disease – it can even be fatal. Fortunately, you can avoid it by having a flu shot (vaccination). Let's talk about the benefits of vaccination for you, for your family and for patients in health care facilities.

DO YOU NEED CONVINCING?

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

"The flu is just a bad cold!"

Influenza, commonly known as flu, is a serious and potentially fatal disease. In Québec each year up to 50,000 people are

hospitalized due to complications (like pneumonia). Flu kills more Quebecers than breast cancer and just as many as diabetes, and it is the sixth leading cause of death in the US. 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.



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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
Extreme fatigue	→ Lasts a few days or longer	→ Rare
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 2 weeks	→ Common, mild to moderate

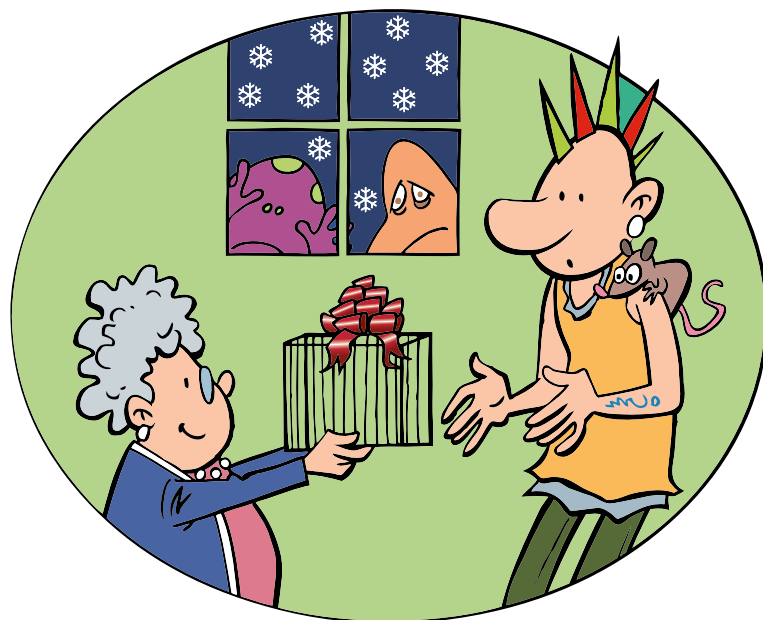
SOURCE: MSSS

"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."

Seasonal flu is a contagious disease that 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?"

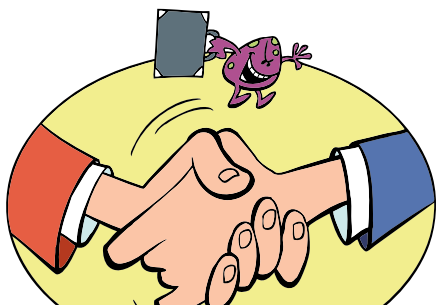
In Québec, 87% of residents in long-term care facilities receive a seasonal flu shot each year, which is very close to the goal of 90%. However, the vaccine is only 30 to 40% effective for these individuals, whereas it is 70 to 90% effective for young, healthy people.

Studies have shown that when more than 60% of employees in long-term care facilities are vaccinated, the mortality rate for residents drops by 40%! 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.

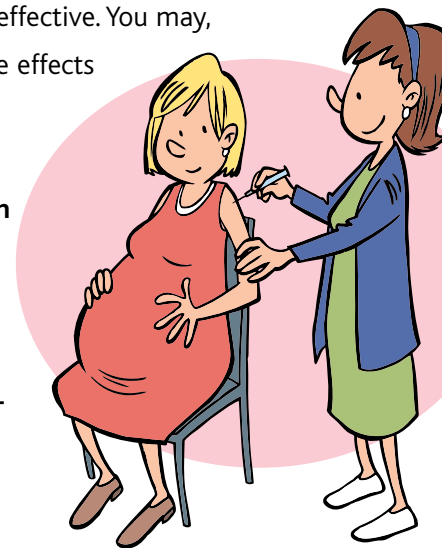
"I'm afraid of the potential side effects of the flu shot."

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 pro-

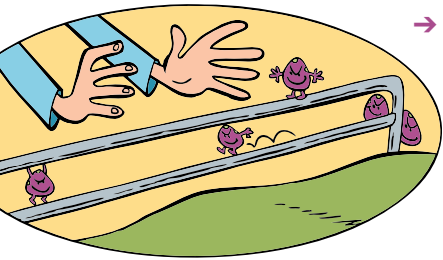


tein, preservatives) could have an allergic reaction within minutes of the injection, which is why you are asked not to leave for 15 minutes after being vaccinated.

→ **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 100,000 shots were given.

→ **Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS):** in 1976, GBS was associated with the swine flu vaccination campaign. However, studies have not shown a link between the flu vaccination and GBS since 1976.

→ **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.

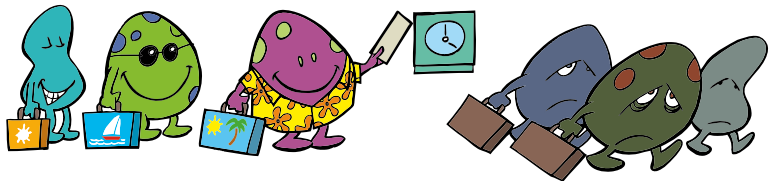
"I'm afraid that the vaccination will deplete my immune system."

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 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!"

A new vaccine formula is developed each year to provide the best possible protection against the latest flu strain. The three most common virus strains in the southern hemisphere are chosen during the summer to produce the vaccine for the upcoming winter. The closer the match between the common strains of virus and the vaccine, the greater your protection.

Virus strains change from year to year and the vaccine's protection wears off after about six months, which is why it is important to be vaccinated annually. Although the shot can be given all year long, the best time for the vaccine is in the fall. Your computer's antivirus program is constantly updated - shouldn't you update your own?



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Don't procrastinate - vaccinate!

Protect yourself

Health care workers face greater exposure to the seasonal flu virus than the general public. Flu is a serious disease, and there is a risk of potentially fatal complications. It's much more serious than a cold! The best way to protect yourself is to have a flu shot.

Protect people at risk

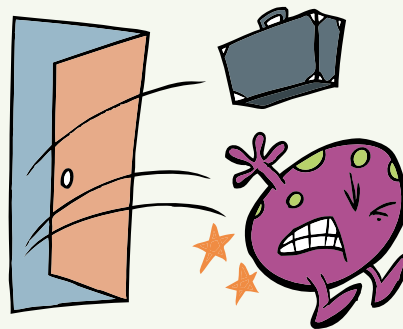
There is a greater risk for some people if they come down with the flu: seniors, children under the age of two, and people suffering from chronic diseases. These people should avoid contact with the virus, even if they are vaccinated. Ideally, all health care workers who come in contact with high-risk patients should be vaccinated against flu to avoid spreading the virus to them.

Protect your family and friends

The flu virus can survive for 24 to 48 hours in the environment. You may be carrying the virus without necessarily getting sick. And if anyone in your family is at risk for complications, it is even more important for you to have a flu shot - for you and for them!

Help wipe out the disease

Mass vaccination of the workforce is an effective way to ensure group immunity and to help wipe out the disease. Higher vaccination rates worldwide have succeeded in eliminating smallpox. If more than 80% of employees were vaccinated each year, we could potentially eradicate seasonal flu in the workplace.



The vaccine is safe and effective

The vaccine is 70 to 90% effective, and since it does not contain any live virus, it can't give you seasonal flu. The side effects are minor and don't last long (soreness, swelling, redness, low-grade fever) and can be relieved with acetaminophen. Since 2000, ORS has been on the decline and only nine cases were recorded in Québec in 2003, out of 100,000 vaccinations. Studies have not shown any link between GBS or autism and flu vaccine. The vaccine is also safe for pregnant women and nursing mothers.

Who should be vaccinated against seasonal flu?

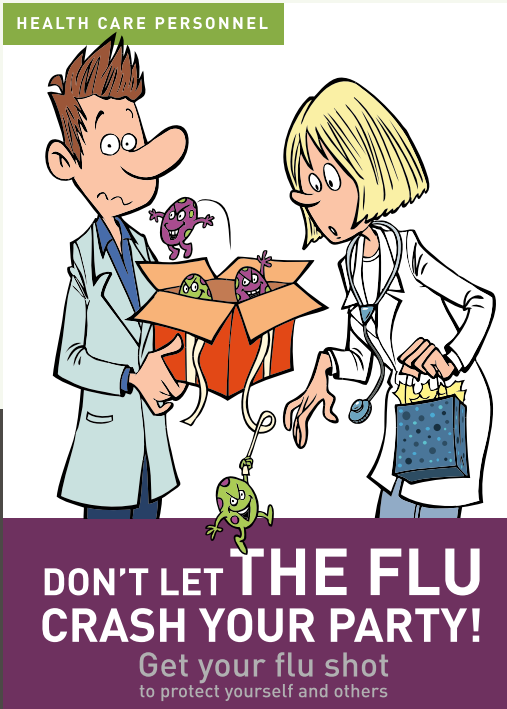
Priority is given to employees who are in direct contact with patients and high-risk clients. In fact, the MSSS (Ministry of Health and Social Services) is aiming for an 80% vaccination rate among health sector personnel.

When should you be vaccinated?

The ideal time is in the fall. The flu vaccine takes two weeks to become fully effective and protection lasts for a year. Your immunity will therefore be fully developed before the holiday season, when you are most likely to be in contact with family and friends, as well as throughout the flu season which usually lasts well into April. You should have a flu shot every year because the composition of the vaccine changes from one year to the next, to include the three most active international viral strains.

Where can you get vaccinated?

The flu vaccine is offered free of charge in the workplace, so check your vaccination clinic's schedule. If you decide to get the shot at your doctor's office or CLSC, please notify your health department so that your vaccination records can be updated accordingly.



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