

# **Infants and children? They need a flu shot**

## **Why should infants and children get the flu vaccine?**

Children under 5 years of age – especially those under 2 – are at high risk of complications from the flu. Flu complications for children under 5 years of age include pneumonia, dehydration and ear infections. In rare cases, flu complications can lead to death. Children who have a medical condition (for example, asthma or diabetes) are at especially high risk of serious flu complications.

Flu vaccination can reduce illness, doctor or nurse practitioner visits and missed school because of the flu. The flu vaccine can also prevent flu-related hospitalization. The flu vaccine can help protect other members of your family, including babies less than 6 months old who are too young to get the flu vaccine.

Flu season can begin as early as November. It's a good idea to have your child vaccinated at the start of flu season. It takes about 2 weeks for the vaccine to give protection against flu viruses.

## **Why are infants and children at an increased risk of serious complications from the flu?**

Children and infants are more likely to get the flu or have flu-related complications, because their immune systems are still developing.

## **How can I protect my children from getting the flu?**

Make sure that your children get the flu vaccine. Annual flu vaccination is the best way to prevent flu and its potentially severe complications in children.

Ontario offers a flu vaccine for children that provides protection against four flu strains that are expected to circulate during the flu season. It is available as an injection for those aged six months to 17 years.

Your doctor or nurse practitioner can tell you about the vaccine ingredients and answer questions you may have about the flu shot.

## **Who should not get the flu shot?**

Children and youth should not get the flu shot if they:

- Are under 6 months of age
- Had a serious allergy to a previous dose or any ingredient in the vaccine (except eggs)
- Have developed Guillain-Barré syndrome within six weeks of a previous flu vaccination, however this should be weighed against the risks of not being protected against the flu.

## **Is the flu vaccine safe for infants and children?**

Like all medicines, flu vaccine ingredients have been tested to make sure they are safe. Public Health Ontario and the Public Health Agency of Canada regularly check the safety of the flu vaccine.

Some children have mild side effects after receiving the flu shot– such as soreness, redness or swelling at the place on the

body where the shot was given. These may last 1 or 2 days. Serious reactions to the flu vaccine are very rare.

## Is the flu shot painful?

The vaccine may sting, but only for a few seconds. Getting the flu shot is very quick!

There are some things you can do to help with pain during the shot:

- If you are breastfeeding, feed your baby before, during and after getting the flu shot. The physical closeness and familiar taste of breast milk will calm your baby. If breastfeeding is not possible during your visit, feed your baby a bottle of expressed breast milk or formula.
- Use a medication that numbs the skin (either a cream or a patch) before your child gets the flu shot. This medication can be purchased without a prescription. Talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about when and where to put the cream on your child.
- Hold or cuddle your child during the injection.
- Help your child “blow out the pain” by taking long, deep breaths. Deep breathing will help you and your child relax.
- Take your child’s attention away from the needle, to help calm their fears. You could read a book or sing a song to them.
- Rub your child’s arm. The touch from your hand will compete with the pain from the needle. (Don’t rub directly on the injection site, as this can increase the feeling of pain.)

- After the shot, use a cool, wet cloth to reduce any redness, soreness or swelling in the area where the flu shot was given.

## What else can I do to prevent the flu?

- Get a flu shot for yourself. Everyone 6 months of age and older should get immunized against the flu! Parents of children with a medical condition or parents who have children less than 6 months old should be vaccinated.
- Take everyday precautions: wash your hands and avoid contact with people who are sick with the flu.

## I think my child has the flu, what can I do?

Symptoms of the flu include fever, cough or sore throat, headache and tiredness. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea. If your child gets flu symptoms, contact your doctor or nurse practitioner immediately or call Telehealth at 1-866-797-0000 to speak with a health care professional.

## Where can my children get the flu vaccine?

Children between the ages of 6 months and 4 years can get the flu vaccine at a doctor or nurse practitioner’s office or local public health unit. Children and youth between the ages of 5 and 17 years can get the flu vaccine at a doctor or nurse practitioner’s office, local public health unit or a pharmacy.



For more information, visit [ontario.ca/flu](https://ontario.ca/flu)