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Winter is coming: Get a flu shot to protect yourself

Winter is coming – and with winter comes influenza season. Protect yourself and your loved ones against [influenza](#), often called the flu, by getting your flu shot and preventing the spread of germs.

The [flu shot](#) is available through your pharmacist, health-care provider, First Nations community health nurses, or your local health unit. Interior Health (IH) immunization clinics will begin the week of **Nov. 1** and will continue in communities throughout the month, with flu clinics by appointment available throughout the rest of the season.

To find an influenza clinic or provider near you, watch for local announcements, contact your local public health unit, physician’s office or pharmacy, or visit the Immunize BC [Influenza Clinic Locator](#).

The flu shot is safe, easy to get, and free for those at risk and their loved ones. The people at the greatest risk of influenza-related complications are adults and children with underlying health conditions, residents of long-term care homes and other chronic-care facilities, people 65 years of age and older, children under 60 months of age, pregnant women, and Aboriginal peoples.

“It’s especially important to get vaccinated if you have loved ones that are at increased risk of complications from influenza,” says Dr. Silvina Mema, IH Medical Health Officer. “When you get the flu shot, you improve your chances of going flu free this season. Furthermore, by getting the shot you are building protection around your loved ones and reducing their chances of getting sick.”

The flu shot is free for the following people:

- People 65 years and older and their caregivers/household contacts;
- People of any age in long-term care facilities;
- Children and adults with chronic health conditions and their household contacts;
- Children and adolescents (six months to 18 years) with conditions treated for long periods of time with Aspirin (ASA), and their household contacts;
- Children and adults who are morbidly obese;
- Aboriginal people;
- All children six to 59 months of age;
- Household contacts and caregivers of infants and children from birth to 59 months of age;
- Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy during the influenza season and their household contacts;
- Visitors to hospitals, health centres and long-term care facilities;
- People who work with live poultry;
- Health-care and other care providers in facilities and community settings who are capable of transmitting influenza disease to those at high risk of influenza complications;
- People who provide care or service in potential outbreak settings housing high-risk persons (e.g., crews on ships); and
- People who provide essential community services (first responders, corrections workers).

Influenza is a serious and contagious respiratory infection that can lead to hospitalization and, in severe cases, death. The infection spreads when a person comes into contact with droplets from an infected person who coughs or sneezes. Symptoms of influenza may include fever, aches, fatigue, headaches, muscle pain, a runny nose, sore throat, and cough.

“People often confuse influenza with the common cold, but they are not the same and are caused by different viruses. A cold is usually a milder illness that can make you uncomfortable for a few days,” says Dr. Mema. “In contrast, flu symptoms are more debilitating, and potentially life threatening to those at risk of complications.”

You can also reduce your risk of illness by preventing the spread of germs.

- Wash your hands frequently throughout the day, especially after coughing or sneezing;
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue;
- Stay home if you are sick; and
- If your children are sick, keep them home from daycare and schools.

For more information, visit www.interiorhealth.ca

Interior Health is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and providing a wide range of quality health-care services to more than 740,000 people living across B.C.'s vast interior. For more information, visit www.interiorhealth.ca, follow us on Twitter [@Interior_Health](https://twitter.com/Interior_Health), or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/InteriorHealth.