



Why SHOULD HEALTHCARE WORKERS GET IMMUNIZED?

You are more likely to get influenza if you do not get immunized. You can spread the flu 1-2 days before you know you are sick.

Immunization for all employees

The annual influenza vaccine is safe and effective. **All AHS staff** should receive their influenza immunization each year. The vaccine protects us against the strains of the influenza virus that are most likely to be circulating in the upcoming season.

As a healthcare worker you have a special role in the fight against influenza.

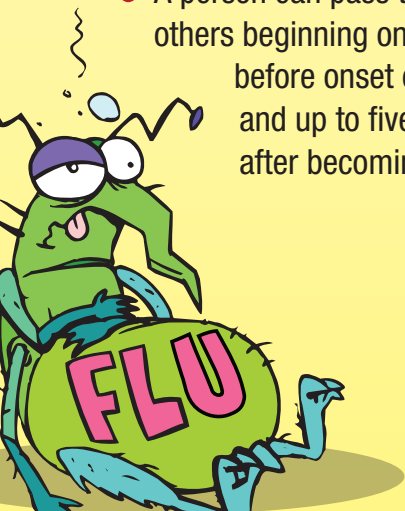
- No patient should get influenza from us while in our care. It is unacceptable to spread influenza to AHS patients or co-workers.
- Workplace Health & Safety needs to know if you have been immunized in order to effectively manage outbreaks. Your immunization status will determine if you will be allowed to work on your unit during an outbreak.
- When you get sick, patient care is affected. When staff are off sick, team workloads increase and staffing levels required for quality patient care are harder to maintain.

As an AHS employee who is immunized against influenza:

- ▶ You reduce the risk of being sick with the influenza virus.
- ▶ You protect your family, your co-workers, and your patients.
- ▶ You are contributing to a healthy and safe workplace for all.

INFLUENZA (FLU) FACTS

- Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and can lead to hospitalization and death.
- Seasonal influenza spreads easily from person to person by respiratory droplets through the air. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, droplets containing the influenza virus get into the air.
- The seasonal influenza virus can also live on hands or other surfaces and be passed through touching. The virus can live on hard surfaces such as toys, eating utensils, door handles and telephones for up to 48 hours and soft surfaces such as clothes for eight to ten hours. It is then spread when a person touches these contaminated surfaces and then touches their own mouth, nose or eyes before washing their hands.
- A person can pass the virus to others beginning one to two days before onset of symptoms and up to five to seven days after becoming ill.



MINIMIZE POTENTIAL EXPOSURE

- **Conduct point of care risk assessment:**
 - See www.albertahealthservices.ca/Diseases/hi-dis-flu-influenza-point-care.pdf
- **Maintain source control:**
 - Provide facemasks to patients with signs and symptoms of respiratory infection.
 - Provide supplies to patients for hand hygiene.
- **Adhere to routine practices and contact/droplet precautions:**
 - Single patient room or maintenance of two metres between patients sharing a room/space.
 - Wear a procedure/surgical mask for any encounter with a patient who has, or is suspected of having, an influenza-like illness (ILI).
 - Wear an N95 respirator when performing an aerosol generating medical procedure (AGMP).
 - An N95 respirator is available if a healthcare worker feels it is necessary following a point of care risk assessment.
 - Wear eye protection or face shield any time a mask or N95 is required.
 - Wear an isolation gown (cloth or disposable) for direct contact with patient or patient's environment.
 - Wear non-sterile gloves on entry into patient's room or bed space.
- **Use hand hygiene:**
 - Before direct contact with a patient.
 - Before leaving a patient's room or bed space.
 - After removing Personal Protective Equipment (gowns, gloves, mask/respirator, and eye protection).

For additional information on minimizing your potential exposure and management of ILI outbreaks, please visit: www.albertahealthservices.ca/2919.asp

High rates of immunization among nurses and healthcare workers have been linked to healthier workplaces and improved outcomes in patients.

Influenza outbreaks in hospitals and long-term care facilities have been linked to low immunization rates among healthcare workers.

If you are immunized by Public Health or a third party, it is critical that you report your immunization to AHS by signing the consent on your Public Health Immunization Record or by submitting a Notification of Third Party Immunization Form. Your immunization status will determine if you will be allowed to work on your unit during an outbreak.

In 2012/13, AHS staff missed 95 days of work because they caught influenza at work. This lost-time costs AHS in Workers Compensation Board claims and replacement staffing costs.

HEALTHCARE WORKERS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q What can I do to help reduce the spread of influenza in my workplace?

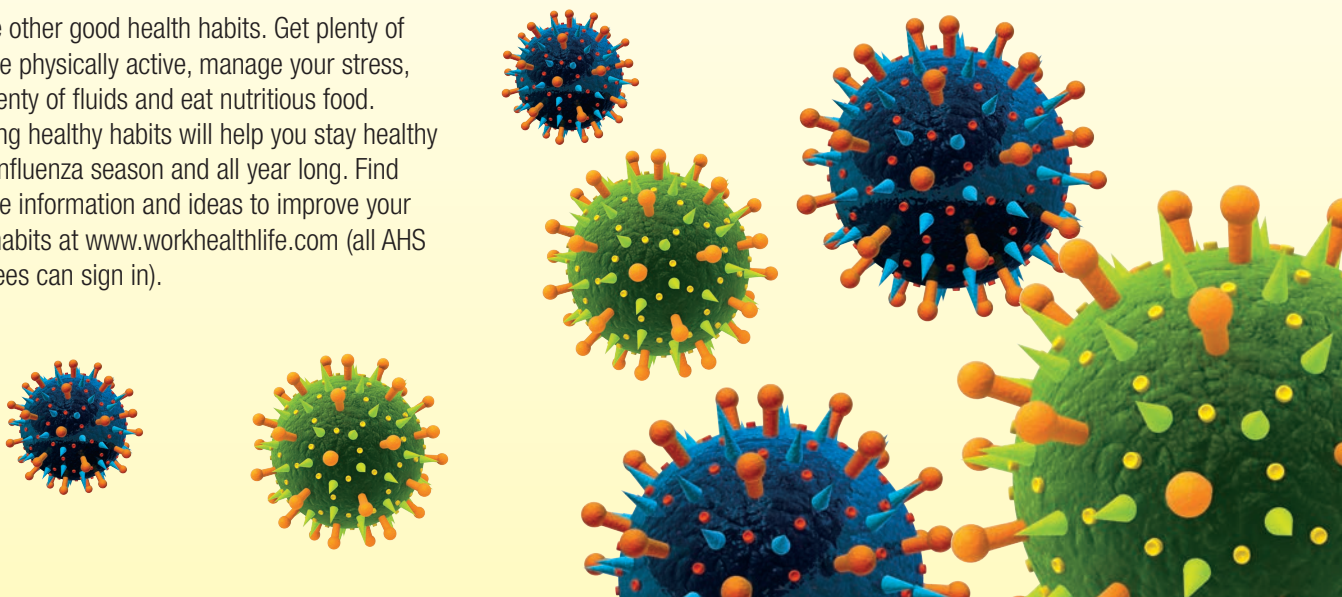
- A**
- ▶ Get the seasonal influenza immunization annually. This is the single best way to prevent being infected with influenza. Immunization is needed every year because influenza viruses change. A new vaccine is made each year to provide protection against the virus most likely to cause illness in that year. The best time to be immunized is early in the seasonal influenza season which is October or November.
 - ▶ Wash your hands often with soap and water, or clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains 60%-90% alcohol. Always wash your hands before eating or drinking, during breaks and especially after using copy/fax machines, shared computers and phones.
 - ▶ Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Cover your mouth and nose with your arm or a tissue when coughing or sneezing, not your hands. Always clean your hands after using a tissue.
 - ▶ Stay home and rest when you are sick so you do not spread the illness to others. To manage your symptoms seek advice from healthcare professionals as needed.
 - ▶ Clean your work area. Frequently wipe down your keyboard, mouse and phone with disinfectant wipes.
 - ▶ Practice other good health habits. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food. Practicing healthy habits will help you stay healthy during influenza season and all year long. Find out more information and ideas to improve your health habits at www.workhealthlife.com (all AHS employees can sign in).

Q What's the difference between influenza and the 'stomach flu'?

- A**
- ▶ Influenza is a respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus, whereas stomach upsets (commonly, but incorrectly, referred to as 'stomach flu') are not caused by the influenza virus. As a distinct type of illness, stomach upset impacts your gastro-intestinal system, not your respiratory system, and can be caused by many things, including, but not limited to, Norovirus. Your influenza immunization protects you against the serious - potentially fatal - influenza viruses circulating each influenza season. To prevent stomach upset, frequent hand-washing is the best measure.

Q Last year I had the influenza immunization and became ill after. Was this caused by the immunization?

- A**
- ▶ No, there is no live virus in the vaccine provided to AHS employees. You can't get ill with influenza from the influenza vaccine.
 - ▶ It will take up to two weeks after immunization for your immune system to build antibodies against the influenza so you can still get influenza during these two weeks.



Q What are the possible reactions to the vaccine?

A ▶ Most people have no reactions to the vaccine. Reactions that do occur are typically mild, usually occur within 6-12 hours after the immunization, and commonly disappear within 24-48 hours. Possible common reactions include:

- mild pain, redness and/or swelling where the needle was given,
- irritability and/or tiredness,
- mild fever, muscle aches and pains.

If you have a reaction you can:

- Apply an ice pack or a cool moist cloth where the needle was given to reduce the pain and swelling.
- Take a medication such as acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) to reduce the pain or if a fever develops.
- If you experience a reaction other than those described above, please report it to Health Link Alberta, 1-866-408-5465 (LINK).

Q I am pregnant. Can I still get the influenza immunization?

A ▶ Yes, the seasonal influenza vaccine is highly recommended by Health Canada for anyone six months of age and older, including pregnant and breast-feeding women (unless you fall into an exception, as detailed in the next question).

Q Is there anyone who should not have the seasonal influenza vaccine?

A ▶ Yes. Persons who should not have seasonal influenza vaccine are:

- those with a history of severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to influenza vaccine or any of its components,
- those who have had an unusually severe reaction to influenza vaccine in the past, or
- those younger than six months of age.

Individuals with an egg allergy should talk to an occupational health nurse, a public health nurse or their doctor before receiving the vaccine.

For more information and answers to all your questions about Seasonal Influenza Immunization, check out AHS Workplace Health and Safety at www.insite.albertahealthservices.ca/2108.asp

MYTH

I NEVER GET SICK, SO I DON'T NEED THE FLU SHOT

FACT

Healthy people CAN still become very sick from influenza. You can spread the flu to your patients and your loved ones 1-2 days before you know you are sick.