

Frequently Asked Questions about the Flu Shot (Influenza Vaccine)

Information for People with Cancer and their Caregivers

Key Points:

- Unless you have another medical reason to avoid the flu shot, it is a good idea for you, your family and your other close contacts to get the flu shot.
- If you are under age 65, get the standard dose of the flu shot.
- Avoid the nasal spray flu vaccine.
- When to get the flu shot depends on where you are in your cancer journey, and the type of treatment you are getting.
- You can get the flu shot at some local pharmacies or your family doctor's office.

Should I get the flu shot this year?

Yes, getting the flu shot is a good idea for **everyone over 6 months of age**, including people with cancer. The flu shot is the best defence against the flu.

When should I avoid getting, or wait to get, the flu shot?

Please **don't** get the flu shot if you:

- Are allergic to any ingredients of the flu shot
- Have had a bad reaction to the flu shot in the past
- Were told by your family doctor that it is not safe for you to get the flu shot

Please **wait** to get the flu shot if:

- You think you have COVID-19 symptoms
- You have tested positive for COVID-19, or
- You have been in recent close contact with someone who has COVID-19

If your cancer treatment includes immunotherapy, please talk to your cancer doctor about whether or not the flu shot is right for you.

Should the people around me get the flu shot too?

Yes, it is important for your family members and people who are around you regularly to get the flu shot. This will lower your chances of getting the flu from them.

Will the flu shot lower my chances of getting COVID-19?

The flu shot will not protect you from getting COVID-19. The flu shot also won't protect you from getting sick because of bacteria or other germs. The flu shot may lower your chance of getting the flu virus, and prevent the spread of the flu virus.

Can I get the nasal spray flu vaccine?

No, the nasal spray is not safe for you because it is a live vaccine. This means it has a live, weak copy of the flu virus. When your immune system is weak, the live copy of the flu virus can make you sick. The regular flu shot is safe for you because it has the dead flu virus.

What dose of flu shot do I need?

If you are **under the age of 65**, get the **standard dose** of the flu shot.

If you are **over the age of 65**, try to get the **high dose** of the flu shot. If you are not able to get the high dose of the flu shot, the standard dose will still help protect you from the flu virus.

Do I need to get the high dose flu shot because I have or had cancer?

If you are under the age of 65, you don't need the high dose of the flu shot, even if you have or had cancer.

When should I get the flu shot?

If you are getting cancer treatment right now, or you finished treatment within the past 3 months, you have a higher chance of getting the flu. When to get the flu shot depends on where you are in your cancer journey, and/or the type of treatment you are getting.

The information below is for some types of cancer treatment. If the list doesn't include the type of treatment you got or are getting, talk to your cancer doctor.

I am getting Intravenous (I.V) Chemotherapy (by needle into a vein):

- If you are **going to start I.V chemotherapy soon**, try to get the flu shot before you start chemotherapy.
- If you are **already getting I.V chemotherapy**, get the flu shot 2-3 days before your next chemotherapy treatment.
- If you **recently finished I.V chemotherapy**, get the flu shot 3-4 weeks after your last treatment.

I am getting Oral Chemotherapy (by mouth as a pill):

- If you are **getting or got oral chemotherapy**, talk to your cancer doctor about the best time to get your flu shot.

I am getting Radiation Therapy:

- If you are **getting radiation therapy**, check with your primary nurse or cancer doctor before getting the flu shot. They will let you know when it is safe for you to get the flu shot.
- If you are getting radiation therapy on one-side of your body, get the flu shot on the opposite side of your body.

I am not getting any treatment right now:

- Unless you got oral chemotherapy or immunotherapy, if you finished treatment **more than 4 weeks ago**, get the flu shot as soon as you can.
- **If you recently finished oral chemotherapy or immunotherapy**, talk to your cancer doctor about getting the flu shot.

Where may I get the flu shot safely?

You can get a flu shot at:

- Some community pharmacies
 - Call your local pharmacy to ask if they are giving the flu shot
- Your family doctor's office

Before you get your flu shot:

- Call your local pharmacy or your family doctor's office to check if they have the flu shot.
- Try to book a time to get your flu shot.
 - Many pharmacies and family doctors are letting people book a time to get the flu shot so that everyone can get the flu shot safely. You may want to book a time earlier in the morning, when there are less people around.
- Ask your pharmacy or family doctor if they can make any special arrangements for you to get the flu shot.

How else can I protect myself?

Remember that the symptoms of the flu and COVID-19 are very alike. To keep yourself safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19, continue to follow safety steps in the information sheet called, "[COVID-19 and Cancer: What you need to know](#)" by Ontario Health.

Who can I ask more questions about the flu shot?

If you have questions about the flu shot, and you are getting treatment for cancer right now, please talk to your cancer doctor.

If you have or had cancer, you are not getting cancer treatment right now, and you have questions about the flu shot, talk your family doctor or your cancer doctor.

You may also visit the [Ontario Ministry of Health's website](https://www.ontario.ca/page/flu-facts) for more information at <https://www.ontario.ca/page/flu-facts>

Disclaimer:

Trillium Health Partners has made this resource to give patients, families and caregivers general information about the flu shot. The information in this resource does not replace medical advice. Every effort has been made to ensure information in this resource is complete, correct and up-to-date, but no guarantee is made to that effect. If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this resource, please talk to your healthcare team.

References:

British Columbia Cancer Agency. (2020, October 1). Influenza vaccine recommendations for adults with cancer. <http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/chemotherapy-protocols-site/Documents/Supportive%20Care/BCCancerImmunizationRecommendations.pdf>

Government of Canada. (2020, October 30). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Symptoms and treatment*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/symptoms.html#s>

Ministry of Health, Government of Ontario. (2020, October 9). *Flu shot safety and effectiveness*. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/flu-vaccine-safety-effectiveness>

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