

Flu vaccinations are important too!

Every fall in North America, the medical community prepare for the arrival of influenza, a seasonal viral respiratory infection that arrives in October, peaks between December and February, and can continue into May. Individuals over 65, the very young and those with pre-existing chronic health conditions are at greatest risk, but influenza can make anyone feel miserable. While Influenza occurs every year, the timing, severity, and length of the season is unpredictable, often varying from one year to the next. Typically, the Flu is a cause of significant illness and suffering, with about 12,000 people hospitalized and 3,500 people dying in Canada every year.

While Influenza and COVID-19 are not the same disease, they have many things in common. They are both transmitted via airborne particles and respiratory droplets. They also share similar symptoms such as fever or chills, cough, sore throat, stuffy nose, body aches, headaches, and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children. This makes it hard to know which one you may have, without doing specific testing.

The same Public Health precautions that we have become accustomed to during the Pandemic will also help reduce your chance of getting the flu. Last year, lockdowns, wearing masks, social distancing and good hand washing all contributed to much lower rates of influenza than usual. However, the best way to lower your chances of getting influenza is by getting a flu shot.

Flu vaccines have been safely and effectively used worldwide for decades. There are 2 different types of Influenza - A and B, each of which has many different strains which change from year to year. Yearly flu shots are designed to protect you from the specific strains that are expected each year. It usually takes 2-3 weeks to become protected and the protection lasts for 6 to 12 months. While the flu vaccine may only be 40-60 % effective in preventing getting the flu, it will still greatly decrease the number of people who get hospitalized.

Serious side effects are very rare, and even those allergic to eggs or latex can now safely receive a flu shot. Only infants under 6 months of age or those who have had a serious allergic reaction to a previous flu shot and have been advised by an allergist, should not get a flu shot. Most common side effects are a sore arm and rarely a low-grade fever.

Flu shots are available through your primary care provider as well as through many local pharmacies. The PEFHT website has a list of participating pharmacies, or check with your own pharmacy. If you still need a COVID shot, you might be able to get it at the same time as there is no need to wait between vaccinations.

By keeping vigilant and getting vaccinated we can prevent both COVID and Influenza from shutting down our hospitals and our communities. Thanks for doing your part to help keep us all safe and healthy.

PEFHT COVID Vaccination group