

HEALTH CARE WORKERS CAN GET THE FLU TOO

By Dr. Sheela Basrur, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health

Employees in the health care sector are the most important link in keeping the people of Ontario healthy. Whether you are a nurse, doctor, paramedic or homecare provider, you are all vital to the well-being and health of millions of Ontarians each and every day.

That's why it is important for you to get immunized against influenza annually. The influenza vaccine not only protects you from influenza, but it keeps the people you come in contact with healthy too. You and your loved ones can enjoy the benefits of a flu-free season.

Studies have shown that health care workers can be a key cause of outbreaks in a variety of health care settings, including hospitals, medical offices, long-term care homes and rehabilitation centres.

In order to protect both your colleagues and the people you treat daily, you need to take some of the following precautions during flu season:

- cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing with a tissue or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not into your hands
- wash your hands frequently and thoroughly
- use routine infection control practices and additional precautions as required to prevent infection transmission

Remember, influenza, especially in a health care setting, is a risk for both the health care worker and the patients who are susceptible to acquiring and transmitting the virus.

Encourage all of your patients, family, friends and colleagues, not just those in high-risk groups, to get immunized against influenza. Help to debunk some common myths about influenza and the need to be immunized:

I don't need the flu shot because I got one last year.

The flu shot is needed every year. The strains change yearly, and each year a new vaccine is produced to offer protection against the more common strains of the virus that are circulating at that time.

Getting a flu shot will give me the flu.

This is simply not true. The flu shot contains no live virus and is designed to fight specific flu virus. A flu shot will not protect you against a cold or other respiratory infections.

The flu is just a bad cold.

A cold is not the flu. Cold symptoms and complications from colds are much milder than that of influenza.

Do the right thing, for you, your co-workers and family and get immunized against influenza.