

## **THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR NOT TOO EARLY TO BE THINKING ABOUT THE FLU**

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

The fall season is here and the flu season is just around the corner. You and your loved ones can reduce the risk of getting the flu simply by getting a free flu shot. It's available to anyone aged six months or older, who lives, works or attends school in Ontario. It's as easy as booking an appointment with your family doctor or visiting a local flu clinic.

Even after getting the shot, these are some of the common precautions that everyone should take to avoid getting the flu:

- wash hands for at least 15 seconds with soap and warm water often, at least after every trip to the bathroom;
- cover mouths when coughing or sneezing, and wash hands immediately after;
- carry an alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap-based moist towelettes and use after coughing or sneezing if a sink is not accessible.

The influenza virus is very infectious and is spread from person to person mainly by droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. In some cases, the flu can be spread when an infected person touches a surface like a doorknob, a countertop or a telephone. That same virus can spread if anyone touches these objects and then proceeds to touch his or her mouth, nose or eyes.

Flu symptoms that children might experience include earaches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cough, runny eyes and stuffy nose, fever, chills, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, extreme weakness and fatigue. When treating the flu, get plenty of rest and drink lots of liquids.

The following are some common myths about getting a flu shot:

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

The flu shot is needed every year. The flu 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 the 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 influenza viruses. The 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 those from the flu.

Protect your children — and yourself this flu season. Get the flu shot.