

Health Care Facility Visitors

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is it important for me to get vaccinated against influenza?

Influenza – sometimes called “the flu” – spreads very easily, can be severe and cause serious complications or death, particularly in vulnerable people, including hospital or residential care patients. You can spread influenza for 24 hours before you have any symptoms, so you can pass the virus on to your family and friends before you even know you are sick.

The most effective way to prevent the spread of influenza is by getting vaccinated, staying home when sick, and washing your hands regularly. If you don't get vaccinated, you will then be expected to protect hospital patients by wearing a mask while you are in a health care facility during the influenza season. In other words, from the beginning of December through to the end of March you are expected to be immunized or wear a mask when visiting patients.

We also ask that you wash your hands or use hand sanitizer at available hand hygiene stations throughout the facility.

By following this policy when you visit your loved ones, you will help to protect them and other people in health facilities from getting a potentially serious illness.

What are the health care facilities that will follow this policy?

All health care facilities that serve and treat patients are covered by this policy. This includes:

- Hospitals including emergency rooms and admitting offices
- Clinics
- Health care centres
- Long-term residential care facilities
- Urgent care facilities

When do I need to be vaccinated?

The exact timing of the influenza season varies from year to year, but it is generally from early December to the end of March, so if you are visiting patients during that time period, you will be expected to be vaccinated against influenza or wear a mask.

When and where do I have to wear a mask?

If you have not been vaccinated against influenza this year, you are expected to wear a mask at all times in our facilities, except when eating or drinking.

Where do I get a mask?

Masks are provided at the entrance, and at various other locations throughout the facility. If you need help finding a mask, please ask at the reception desk.

Is there a cost for the vaccine?

This fall and winter, everyone in British Columbia who is six months of age or older can get the influenza vaccine free of charge.

Who is most at risk?

Everybody is at risk of getting infected with influenza, but some groups are at much higher risk of severe disease, complications, and death. These groups are:

- Children six months to less than five years of age.
- Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy during the influenza season.
- Seniors 65 years and older.
- Residents of any age living in residential care, assisted living or other group facilities.
- Aboriginal people.
- Children and teenagers required to take acetylsalicylic acid for long periods of time due to a medical condition.
- Children and adults with certain medical conditions, including:
 - Heart or lung disorders that require regular medical care, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or cystic fibrosis.
 - Kidney disease, chronic liver disease such as hepatitis, diabetes, cancer, anemia, or weakened immune system.
 - Those with health conditions causing difficulty breathing, swallowing, or a risk of choking on food or fluids, such as people with severe brain damage, spinal cord injury, seizures or neuromuscular disorders.
 - Those who are very obese.

In addition, these groups are more likely to pass influenza to people at very high risk:

- Household contacts of people at high risk.
- Household contacts, caregivers and daycare staff of children under five years of age.
- Doctors, nurses and other health care providers.
- People who live or work in confined settings, such as correctional facilities
- Those who provide care or service to people at high risk in potential outbreak settings such as cruise ships.

And it is also important for other groups to get vaccinated against influenza:

- People who provide essential community services such as police officers, firefighters and ambulance attendants.
- Farmers and other people who work with live poultry.

Where can I get the influenza vaccine?

Influenza vaccines are provided at a wide variety of locations across the province, including:

- Public health units
- Pharmacies (pharmacists can immunize people 5 years of age and older with the injectable vaccine and 2 years of age and older with the nasal spray influenza vaccine).
- Doctors' offices
- Travel clinics

To find the nearest influenza vaccine location, visit www.health.gov.bc.ca/flu or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1.

For more information about the influenza vaccine, visit www.immunizebc.ca.

Thank you for your commitment to keeping your loved ones and our other hospital patients safe.