

Keep vaccines up to date this holiday season, says Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health

By Dr. Kieran Moore Chief Medical Officer of Health Province of Ontario

With the holiday season fast approaching, it's important to take all necessary precautions to keep yourself and your loved ones healthy, including by ensuring your vaccines are up to date. Respiratory illness season typically begins in the fall and lasts through the winter months, when colder weather and indoor gatherings make it easier for viruses to spread. This includes several common viruses such as influenza (flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and COVID-19.

Currently, COVID-19 and RSV activity remain low in Ontario, but flu season is officially here, and cases are steadily increasing. The flu shot remains one of the most effective ways to protect ourselves from influenza. Each year, the vaccine is designed to cover multiple strains. Getting vaccinated reduces your risk of catching the flu and, most importantly, lowers the chance of severe illness, hospitalization and serious complications.

[Flu and COVID-19 shots are already available across Ontario](#) for people 6 months and older at participating pharmacies, doctor and nurse practitioner offices or public health units. RSV immunization is also available for eligible groups, including adults aged 75 and older, infants and pregnant women. Those at higher risk of severe illness are especially encouraged to get vaccinated early.

Influenza activity is expected to peak as early as mid-December in some regions. As the vaccine takes about two weeks to reach full effectiveness, getting vaccinated now will help ensure you are protected when virus circulation is at its highest, while also reducing the spread of illness and protecting those most at risk. If you or a loved one are at higher risk for severe illness, you should talk to your health-care provider now to plan for testing and treatment.

As the holidays approach, let's all remember the simple steps that make a big difference: wash your hands, cover coughs and sneezes, clean shared surfaces regularly, and stay home if you are sick.