



INFECTION CONTROL IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

Information for Residents and Their Families

What is Influenza?

Influenza (or flu) is a common respiratory illness affecting millions of Canadians each year. Getting an influenza vaccination (or flu shot) every year can help prevent the infection or reduce the severity of the illness.

In Canada, flu season usually runs from November to April and an estimated 10-25% of Canadians may get the flu each year. Although most of these people recover completely, an estimated 4,000 to 8,000 Canadians, mostly seniors, die every year from pneumonia related to flu and many others may die from other serious complications of flu.

How does the flu spread?

The influenza virus spreads through droplets that have been coughed or sneezed into the air by someone who has the flu. You can get the flu by breathing in these droplets through your nose or mouth, or by the droplets landing directly on your eyes. The flu virus is also found on the hands of people with the flu and on surfaces they have touched. You can become infected if you shake hands with infected persons or touch contaminated surfaces and transfer the virus to your own eyes, nose or mouth.

After you get a flu shot, your immune system produces antibodies against the strains of virus in the vaccine. The antibodies are effective for four to six months. When you are exposed to the influenza virus, the antibodies will help to prevent infection or reduce the severity of the illness.

Minimizing the Risks

The most effective way to protect yourself from flu is to be vaccinated each year in the fall. Flu shots are especially important for:

- anyone living in a nursing home or chronic care facility;
- people 65 years of age and older;
- adults and children with chronic heart and lung disease;
- people with chronic conditions such as diabetes, anemia, cancer, immune suppression, HIV or kidney disease; and
- health care workers, other caregivers and household contacts capable of transmitting influenza to the above at-risk groups.

Regular hand washing is another way to help minimize your risk. By washing your hands often, you will reduce your chance of becoming infected after touching contaminated surfaces.

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The Health Effects of Flu Shots

The benefits of flu shots far outweigh the risks. The flu vaccine cannot cause influenza because it does not contain any live virus. The most common side effect is soreness at the site of injection, which may last a couple of days. You might also notice fever, fatigue and muscle aches within six to 12 hours after your shot, and these effects may last a day or two. Severe allergic reactions to flu shots are rare.

At Golden Dawn

The flu shot is offered to all residents and staff at Golden Dawn in the fall of each year. Residents or staff members who have had a previous severe reaction to the flu shot or have an allergy to eggs do not receive the shot. Those residents who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated until their symptoms lessen.