

Influenza is a viral infection primarily transmitted by droplets spread through coughing or sneezing and through direct or indirect contact with respiratory secretions. Influenza symptoms typically include the sudden onset of fever, cough, and muscle aches and can be very similar to COVID-19 symptoms.

The best way to prevent infection and transmission is by observing [routine practices](#) such as washing your hands often and wearing a mask, staying home if you are sick, **AND getting vaccinated**. According to the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), health care workers/ learners should consider annual influenza vaccination included in their responsibilities to provide the highest standard of care.

Influenza season starts in November and the flu vaccine takes two weeks to be fully effective. The vaccine is usually available early October and is free of charge at most pharmacies, local campus student health services (graduate/undergraduate programs), hospital Occupational Health Services (registered postgrads) or through your healthcare provider. Note other vaccines, including the flu vaccine, may be given at the same time as, or any time before or after a COVID-19 vaccine.

- Contraindications to influenza vaccination:
 - Anaphylactic reaction to any of the components of that specific influenza vaccine, not including egg. Egg allergy is NOT a contraindication for influenza vaccination, as there is a low risk of adverse events associated with the trace amounts of ovalbumin allowed in influenza vaccines manufactured using eggs.
 - Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of a previous influenza vaccination unless another cause was found for the GBS.
- LAIV (live attenuated influenza vaccine, FluMist quadrivalent intranasal spray):
 - Should not be given to people with immune compromising conditions, people with severe asthma, children 2–17 years of age currently receiving aspirin-containing therapy, pregnant women.
 - Should not be administered until 48 hours after antiviral agents active against influenza (e.g., oseltamivir, zanamivir) are stopped, and those antiviral agents, should not be administered until 2 weeks after receipt of LAIV so that the antiviral agents do not inactivate the replicating vaccine virus.
 - **Not recommended** for learners attending in-person clinical placements because there is a theoretical risk for transmitting a vaccine virus to immune-compromised individuals. LAIV recipients should avoid close association with people with severe immune compromising conditions for at least 2 weeks following vaccination.

Immunization with the seasonal influenza vaccine (or a letter from a physician if unable to receive the vaccine due to a valid medical reason) is a **mandatory** requirement for health professional programs, and for visiting electives and non-professional health sciences courses with clinical placements occurring between November and June.

Learners may use our [Health Screening Update Form](#) to document the vaccine, OR submit separate documentation, e.g. pharmacy receipt or note from a qualified health care professional (HCP). Documentation must include student name, date of service, type of vaccine, and HCP name, profession, address.

- Undergraduate/graduate health professional programs:
 - Submit documentation to the Health Screening Office **annually by November 30th** each year. Students who do not complete this requirement by the due date will no longer be cleared for in-person clinical activities, including clinical skills sessions.
 - Instruction for submission can be found on our website:
<https://fhs.mcmaster.ca/healthscreening/formsandsubmission.html>
- Postgraduate Medicine programs:
 - Submit documentation directly to the clinical placement site.
- Visiting electives and Non-Professional Health Sciences courses with placements occurring between November and June:
 - Submit documentation directly to the clinical placement site.

For more information click on:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/flu-facts>

<https://www.hamilton.ca/public-health/health-topics/flu-vaccine>

[Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza and Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccines for 2022-2023](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/canadian-immunization-guide-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2022-2023.html#a1.1)

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Questions? Contact the Health Screening Office: 905-525-9140 ext 22249 or ext 28639, email: hksadmin@mcmaster.ca