
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2013HLTH0111-001676
Nov. 7, 2013

Ministry of Health

British Columbians urged to arm themselves against the flu

VICTORIA – Health Minister Terry Lake and provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall are urging British Columbians to protect themselves, and their loved ones, from influenza by getting vaccinated this flu season.

Clinics now are open throughout the province, and British Columbians can get immunized at a wide variety of locations – from dedicated flu clinics, to their doctor’s offices or local pharmacists.

Flu shots are free in B.C. for all children aged six months to five years of age, seniors 65 years of age and older, pregnant women and Aboriginal people, as well as individuals with chronic health conditions, compromised immune systems, or those who work or live with individuals with a higher risk of complications from the flu.

This year, anyone planning to visit a loved one in a health-care facility, or those who take family members to outpatient appointments will also be eligible for a free flu shot from a licensed practitioner, such as a pharmacist, doctor or nurse.

To find the nearest flu shot clinic, call HealthLink BC at 811 or visit the Influenza Clinic Finder at: www.immunizebc.ca/clinics/flu

Influenza can be a serious illness. Each year between 2,000 and 8,000 Canadians die from its complications – most of them seniors or those with compromised immune systems or underlying health conditions, such as asthma or cystic fibrosis.

All health authorities have implemented an influenza control policy that mandates health-care workers to be vaccinated or wear a mask during flu season, which typically runs from December to April. Health authorities are also expecting the public to protect vulnerable patients from contracting influenza by getting vaccinated, or wearing a mask.

British Columbians who are ineligible for the free vaccine are able to purchase it for a small fee. In addition, many workplaces offer the vaccine to their employees at onsite clinics.

Quotes:

Minister of Health Terry Lake –

“Each year, one out of five British Columbians will get sick from the flu. We all can take simple steps to protect ourselves, and others from getting the flu including washing your hands, staying home if you feel sick, coughing into your sleeve and, of course, getting vaccinated. Together, we can fight the flu this season.”

Provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall –

“By getting vaccinated, individuals will not only protect themselves but they will help protect others who are at risk for complications from the influenza virus. I want to encourage anyone who may visit or come in contact with at-risk individuals to get the flu shot. If they haven’t been vaccinated when visiting someone in a health-care facility, the expectation will be that they will wear a mask. This policy is about doing our best to protect those most vulnerable.”

BC Medical Association president Dr. William Cunningham –

“This year doctors working in health care facilities are required to get their flu shot to reduce the spread of influenza – but this has only limited effect unless everyone else gets vaccinated, too. The doctors of B.C. urge you to protect yourself, protect those who are ill or have chronic conditions, and seek out your doctor, clinic or pharmacy and get vaccinated.”

BC Pharmacy Association president Don Cocar –

“Getting immunized is one of the best ways to protect yourself, and others, against the flu. B.C. pharmacists have been authorized to provide flu vaccines since 2009. Today more than 2,700 community pharmacists in B.C. are authorized to provide flu shots, and are a convenient and accessible option for anyone wanting to get immunized.”

Association of Registered Nurses of BC president Julie Fraser –

“Every day during flu season nurses see the very real impact that the flu can have – not just on children and the elderly, but on otherwise perfectly healthy adults. The Association of Registered Nurses of BC stands behind the ministry’s goal of ensuring every single British Columbian takes preventive measures to ensure the good health of themselves, their families and their community.”

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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Flu shots are provided free of charge to all British Columbians who are at risk of developing complications, or those who have close contact with at-risk individuals.

Those eligible include:

- Seniors 65 years of age, and older and their caregivers.
- Children and adults with chronic health conditions and their household contacts.
- Healthy children between six months and 59 months of age (under five years old).
- Household contacts and caregivers of children under five years old.
- Health-care workers and emergency responders.
- Pregnant women who will be in their third trimester during influenza season.
- Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities.
- Owners and operators of poultry farms.
- Aboriginal peoples.
- People who are very obese (those with a body mass index of 40 or greater).
- Corrections officers and inmates of provincial correctional institutions.
- People who provide care or service in potential outbreak settings that house high-risk persons (such as crew on a ship).
- Anyone planning to visit someone in a health-care facility in British Columbia.

The facts about influenza:

- Each year, between 2,000 and 8,000 Canadians die from complications from influenza.
- Bacterial pneumonia, an infection of the lungs, is the most common complication from influenza, especially in elderly people. It can also lead to more complications for people who have heart, lung or other health conditions.
- Influenza spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing or face-to-face contact. The virus also can spread when a person touches tiny droplets from a cough or sneeze and then touches their eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.
- Many people use the term flu to refer to any illness caused by a virus, such as the “stomach flu” or the common cold. However, the influenza virus causes illness that tends to be more severe than other viruses. Symptoms can begin one to four days after a person is first exposed to the virus. Fever and other symptoms usually last seven to 10 days, but the cough and weakness may last one to two weeks longer.
- An infected person can spread the influenza virus even before feeling sick. An adult can spread the virus from about one day before to five days after symptoms start. Children can spread the virus up to 21 days after symptoms start.

- Along with vaccination, there are ways to help protect yourself from contracting or spreading influenza: wash your hands frequently, always practise proper cough or sneeze etiquette and stay home when you are feeling ill.
- People with mild egg allergies can safely receive the influenza vaccine. People with a history of anaphylaxis to egg should ensure they receive the vaccine in a controlled setting.

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