

# **Influenza (Flu) Shots for School-Aged Children**

In 2001, Ontario was the first province to offer **free** influenza (flu) vaccinations to all Ontario residents. Preventing flu can save health care dollars, prevent overcrowding in emergency departments, and most importantly, prevent serious illness in the elderly and people suffering from chronic diseases, like diabetes and heart disease.

Lambton County residents can receive a **free** flu vaccine at health department clinics, workplaces, doctor's offices, hospitals, long-term care facilities and schools each year. The County of Lambton Community Health Services Department offers **free** clinics in communities across Lambton. Public health nurses also provide flu shots to every school in Lambton.

The flu shot is optional and parents must sign a consent form if they want their child to receive the vaccine at school.

## **Why give school children flu shots?**

Preventing the spread of the flu in the community is a key reason school children should receive the flu vaccine.

Studies show that vaccinating school children can significantly decrease the spread of the flu among people of all ages in a community.

School-aged children are in close contact with each other and can easily pass "bugs" back and forth and then bring them home, often infecting family members, who can pass the virus to others.

## **Things to consider:**

- The flu is a powerful virus, usually resulting in a sudden fever, sore throat, dry cough, headache, muscle aches and tiredness that can leave a person feeling sick for up to 2 weeks.
- The most common side-effects of the vaccine are redness, swelling or soreness in the arm where the needle is given. You **cannot** "get the flu" from the flu shot.
- Flu vaccination has been shown to reduce severe ear infections in young children by up to 36%.
- Infected children can spread the flu virus for much longer than adults (up to 2 weeks), increasing the risk to others.
- Flu can be fatal in very young, and the elderly. Children can easily pass it to grandparents and elderly relatives.

## **When should the vaccine be given?**

- The best time for a flu shot is late October or November. The vaccine protects for 4-6 months.
- Children under 9 years of age require 2 doses with 4 weeks between doses **if** the child did not receive at least one dose of influenza vaccine in previous seasons. If the child has properly received one or more doses of influenza vaccine in the past, they require **one** dose per season thereafter.
- The types of flu can change fast, so a new vaccine is made each year. Have a flu shot every year.

**...More**



## **COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

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### Who should **NOT** get the flu shot?

- Children under 6 months of age
- People who are sick with a fever
- People with a severe allergy to eggs, which are an ingredient in the vaccine

Although an allergic reaction to the flu vaccine is very rare, people are advised to remain for at least 15 minutes after the injection is given.

### How effective is the flu vaccine?

Having a flu shot does not mean you will not get the flu, but health experts believe it is the best prevention available. Studies suggest the flu vaccine offers up to 50%-80% protection in children against the flu.

Generally, the healthier you are the better your body can fight the flu bug. The flu shot gives your body an extra fighting chance.

### How can I prevent the flu?

Your best defence against the flu is a flu shot. But there other ways to boost your protection:

- Wash hands frequently. This is very important with children in school and daycare settings.
- Eat a balanced diet high in fruits and vegetables. Many fruits and vegetables contain nutrients that help your body fight illness.
- Because the elderly are at “high risk” of developing severe illness from the flu, such as pneumonia, people who have signs of any illness should **not** visit seniors in hospitals or long-term care facilities.

For more information about the flu vaccine, or for clinic schedules and information, call the Flu Hotline at 519 383-3812, toll free 1-800-667-1839 or visit [www.lambtonhealth.on.ca](http://www.lambtonhealth.on.ca).