

# The flu and You—Facts for Older Adults



**All age groups can be affected by the flu.**

**But older adults are at a greater risk.**

**Why?** As we age, the function of the immune system declines. Our bodies have fewer immune cells, and they don't work as well. If we get sick, the illness may be more severe<sup>1</sup>.

**Did you know being physically active in a regular way can increase the number of immune cells and improve how they function. That's true, no matter how old we are<sup>2</sup>.**

**Older adults with an underlying health condition are at greater risk for complications or even death due to the flu.**

**Why?** Inflammation and fever associated with the flu can make your body work harder, and put extra strain on your heart. That's why people with heart disease are more likely to suffer from severe influenza that can lead to complications such as pneumonia and serious cardiac events<sup>3</sup>.

**Did you know staying active helps to manage many chronic conditions. The healthier we are, the better we are at fighting viral infections<sup>4</sup>.**

**The high-dose flu shot is more effective for older adults.**

**Why?** Flu vaccines help your body build its own defences so you can do a better job of preventing or fighting infection caused by the flu.

The higher-dose flu vaccine has four times as many antigens (the substance that induces the immune response in the body) compared to the regular flu vaccine. This high dose formulation provides 24% greater protection than the standard flu shot and is recommended for older adults<sup>5</sup>.

**Did you know physical activity can make the flu shot more effective? Physically active older adults produce more antibodies (immune cells) after they get the flu vaccine<sup>6</sup>. That's another good reason to make being active part of your daily routine.**

## More information on flu vaccines for seniors

Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza and Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2024-2025

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/national-advisory-committee-immunization-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2024-2025.html>

[www.activeagingcanada.ca](http://www.activeagingcanada.ca)

**1-800-549-9799**

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2. Effects of Acute and Chronic Exercise on Immunological Parameters in the Elderly Aged: Can Physical Activity Counteract the Effects of Aging? Sellami et al. *Front Immunol*. 9: 2187. 2018.
3. Conrad A, Valour F, Vanhems P. Burden of influenza in the elderly: a narrative review. *Curr Opin Infect Dis*. 36(4):296-302. 2023.
4. Can physical activity ameliorate immunosenescence and thereby reduce age-related multi-morbidity? Duggal et al. *Nature Reviews Immunology* volume 19, pages 563–572. 2019.
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<https://products.sanofi.ca/en/fluzone-qiv-hd-en.pdf>
6. Cardiovascular exercise training extends influenza vaccine seroprotection in sedentary older adults: the immune function intervention trial. Woods et al. *J Am Geriatr Soc*. 57(12):2183-91. 2009.