

# What seniors need to know to stay protected during flu season

**Influenza (the flu) is a respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses. Respiratory infections are infections of parts of the body involved in breathing, such as the sinuses, throat, airways or lungs. Respiratory viruses increase in the fall and winter. This year, several respiratory viruses are circulating at the same time, including: COVID-19; flu (influenza); respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).**

Respiratory viruses spread in several ways. The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends various tips<sup>1</sup> to reduce your risk of getting and spreading viruses including:

- 1 Clean your hands often**
- 2 Avoid touching your face with unclean hands**
- 3 Improve indoor ventilation, when possible, by opening a window or door**
- 4 Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the bend of your arm**
- 5 Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces and objects frequently**

During flu season, you do everything you can to avoid getting sick. You wash your hands, eat healthy foods, are physically active, get your flu shot. Pre-covid, adults aged 65 years and older usually accounted for almost half of positive lab-tested flu cases in Canada each year<sup>2</sup>. As we age, our immune system declines. Our bodies have fewer immune cells, and they don't work as well<sup>3</sup>. So, if we get sick, the illness may be more severe<sup>4</sup>. Recovery can take longer and we may not respond as well as younger people do to vaccines<sup>5</sup>. What's more, the standard flu vaccine is 50% less effective in adults over the age of 65 than it is for the rest of the population<sup>6</sup>. That means for seniors, getting a standard flu shot each year may not be enough protection from influenza. **The good news is that our National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has recommended a higher dose flu vaccine for older adults.** The higher-dose flu vaccine has four times as many antigens (the substance that induces the immune response in the body) than the regular flu vaccine. This high dose formulation provides 24% greater protection than the standard flu shot and is recommended for older adults<sup>7</sup>. Talk to your healthcare provider about the higher dose vaccine. To find out if it is covered in your province, contact your Public Health department. And remember, no vaccine provides 100% protection. Nor can a vaccine help to treat influenza or its complications if you get sick.

## More information on flu vaccines for seniors

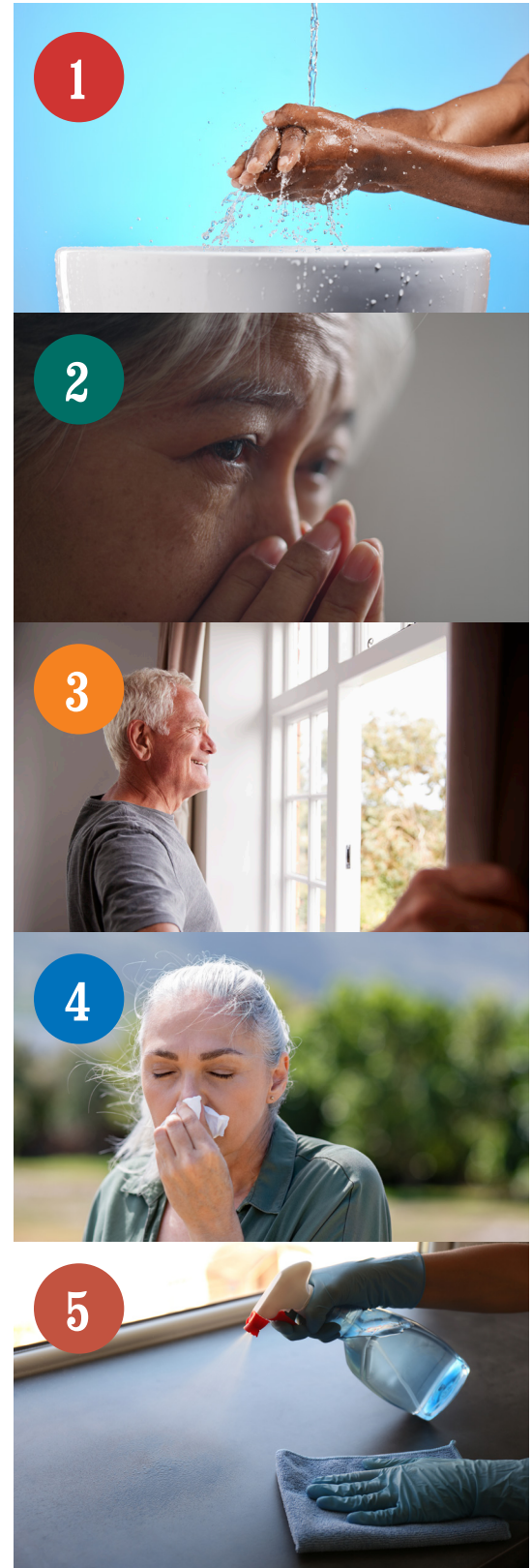
Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza and Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2022–2023

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/canadian-immunization-guide-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2022-2023/naci-2022-2023-statement.pdf>

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Supported by an educational grant from Sanofi Pasteur.



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2. Buckrell et al. National Influenza Annual Report, Canada, 2021–2022: **A brief, late influenza epidemic**. Can Commun Dis Rep. 48(10):473–83. 2022.
3. Murdaca et al. **Impact of Immunosenescence on Viral Infections with an Emphasis on COVID-19**. Front Biosci (Landmark Ed). 26;28(9):225. 2023.
4. Marchi et al. **The burden of influenza and the role of influenza vaccination in adults aged 50-64 years: A summary of available evidence**, Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics, 19:2, 2023.
5. Trombetta et al. **Influenza immunology evaluation and correlates of protection: a focus on vaccines**. Expert Rev Vaccines.15(8):967–76. 2016.
6. Public Health Agency of Canada (2019). An Advisory Committee Statement (ACS) National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI): **Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza and Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2019-2020**.
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