

**Q: What is the difference between COVID-19 vaccines and the Flu shot? Why do I need both?**

**A:** Although COVID-19 and the flu have similar symptoms, they are caused by two very different viruses<sup>1,2</sup>. The COVID-19 and flu vaccines are designed to specifically protect against their respective illness, which means the COVID-19 vaccines will not protect you against the flu, and the flu shot will not protect you against COVID-19<sup>1,2</sup>. Therefore, it is essential that you receive both the COVID-19 vaccines and the flu shot to increase your protection against these illnesses<sup>2</sup>.

**Q: What is the difference between the Flu and COVID-19?**

**A:** Although the flu and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, they are caused by entirely different viruses<sup>3</sup>. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a type of coronavirus, which was first identified in 2019, while the flu is caused by infection with influenza viruses, which were first identified much earlier<sup>3</sup>.

**Q: Why is the flu shot important during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**A:** The flu is among the 10 leading causes of death in Canada<sup>4</sup>. It is estimated that the flu causes 12,200 hospital stays and 3,500 deaths each year in Canada<sup>4</sup>. Although some people only get mildly ill from the flu, others can get very sick such as frail older adults and those whose immune systems may be impaired<sup>5</sup>.



Everyone is encouraged to receive the flu shot to protect themselves and others<sup>4</sup>. When more people receive their flu shot, this will reduce stress on the healthcare system by limiting hospitalizations related to the flu and ensuring more healthcare resources are available to address the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>4,6,7</sup>. As more people gather indoors during the winter, it is important to get your flu shot and protect groups who may be vulnerable to this infection<sup>4</sup>.

**Q: Who should get the flu shot?**

**A:** Everyone 6 months of age and older are recommended to receive the flu shot<sup>1,7</sup>. Individuals at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and those capable of spreading the flu to these populations are highly encouraged to get the flu shot<sup>1</sup>. This includes<sup>1,4,5,7</sup>:

- people with health conditions, such as:
  - cancer and other immune compromising conditions
  - diabetes

- heart disease
- lung disease
- anemia
- obesity
- kidney disease
- neurological or neurodevelopmental conditions
- children up to 18 years of age undergoing treatment for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid (ASA)
- people 65 years and older
- people who live in retirement homes or long-term care homes
- children under 5 years of age
- people who are pregnant
- people who experience barriers in accessing health care
- people who are at an increased risk of disease due to living conditions, such as overcrowding
- caregivers
- childcare providers
- health care providers
- family and other household members of people at risk for worse outcomes from flu
- those who provide services in closed or relatively closed settings to people at high risk, such as workers in long-term care homes or crew on a ship

**Q: I received the flu shot 12 months ago. Why do I need another one?**

**A:** A new flu shot is developed every year because the flu virus often changes from year to year<sup>1</sup>. The protection provided by the flu shot can also wear off, which is why you need to get the new flu shot every year<sup>1</sup>.

**Q: Can I receive a COVID-19 vaccine and the flu shot at the same time?**

**A:** Individuals 12 years of age and older can safely receive both the COVID-19 vaccines and the flu shot at the same time<sup>6,7</sup>. There

is no need to wait between scheduling a COVID-19 vaccine and the flu shot for this group. However, it is recommended that children aged 5 to 11 years of age wait at least 14 days between receiving a COVID-19 vaccine and the flu shot<sup>2,6,7</sup>.

**Q: Do the symptoms of COVID-19 and the flu differ?**

**A:** Since COVID-19 and the flu have similar symptoms, it is recommended to follow COVID-19 precautions if you start to develop any of the symptoms listed below<sup>2,8</sup>:

- fever
- cough
- muscle aches and pain

Other common symptoms include:

- headache
- chills
- fatigue (tiredness)
- loss of appetite
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose

As of December 31st, 2021, the eligibility for COVID-19 PCR testing has changed<sup>9</sup>. It is now recommended that individuals displaying COVID-19 symptoms self-isolate and follow self-monitoring guidelines<sup>8,9</sup>. Positive rapid antigen tests will also no longer require PCR confirmation<sup>9</sup>.

However, COVID-19 PCR testing is available for symptomatic high-risk individuals and individuals working in high-risk settings (e.g., patients and staff within hospitals, long-term care, and retirement homes)<sup>9</sup>. Please refer to the Government of Ontario website for a full list of groups eligible for COVID-19 PCR testing: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1001387/updated-eligibility-for-pcr-testing-and-case-and-contact-management-guidance-in-ontario>

# References

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2. Hamilton Health Sciences. Can you get the flu and COVID vaccines together- plus other FAQs. Published November 10, 2021. Accessed January 12, 2022. <https://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/share/influenza-and-covid-vaccines/>
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9. Government of Ontario News. Updated Eligibility for PCR Testing and Case and Contact Management Guidance in Ontario. Published December 30, 2021. Accessed January 12, 2022. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1001387/updated-eligibility-for-pcr-testing-and-case-and-contact-management-guidance-in-ontario>