

## **REDUCE YOUR RISK OF INFLUENZA: THINK VACCINATION**

Every fall, thousands of people roll up their sleeves for an annual influenza vaccination. Indeed, a Calgary Health Region report in 2005 indicates that well over one-quarter of all residents make the trek to a vaccination clinic each year. But while that number may seem impressive, health officials say it needs to rise. And they're hoping a new effort to boost vaccination rates this year will make it happen.

Starting this fall, Alberta Health and Wellness is expanding its free influenza vaccination program to cover two new population groups – healthy children 24 months to 59 months of age and healthy adults from 50 years up to and including 64 years of age.

Dr. Judy MacDonald, Deputy Medical Officer of Health with the Calgary Health Region, says the decision to expand the eligibility for free vaccinations is an important one. She says getting vaccinated is the best way to avoid contracting influenza, a contagious respiratory virus that affects millions of Canadians every year. Most people struck by influenza recover after suffering through days of fever, headaches, aching muscles, sore throat, and weeks of dry cough and extreme fatigue. But the infection also kills 4,000 to 8,000 people a year, most of whom are elderly.

“Clearly, influenza is not to be taken lightly,” says Dr. MacDonald. “We’ve been working hard over the years to increase vaccination coverage, and the addition of these two new groups should make it easier to protect more of our population.”

Health officials started ramping up efforts to vaccinate individuals against influenza about 10 to 15 years ago. In Alberta, the approach has been to provide free vaccinations to those at highest risk for influenza complications, including the elderly, people with chronic medical conditions, infants six months to 23 months of age, and pregnant women, and to those who could transmit influenza to those at high risk, including household contacts and health-care workers. This effort has met with some success – the vaccination rate among residents of long-term care centres within the Calgary Health Region is 95 percent, and over 21,000 doses of vaccine were given to infants six months to 23 months of age in 2007. But the overall vaccination rate is still below other jurisdictions across the country that have broader vaccination programs.

While the focus will be to increase influenza vaccination rates among those in high risk groups, Dr. MacDonald says everyone should think about getting a shot. “Everyone can benefit from influenza vaccination because it can prevent you from getting the disease, and it can also ensure you do not infect someone else.”

### **Who is eligible for a free vaccination?**

#### **People at high risk for influenza-related complications include:**

- \* Adults and Children with the following:
  - Chronic medical conditions (heart, lung, or kidney disease; diabetes)
  - Cancer or immune deficiency
- \* Residents of chronic care facilities (e.g., Long-term care centres, lodges)
- \* People 65 years of age and older

- \* Healthy children six months to 23 months of age
- \* Healthy pregnant women and breastfeeding women

**People capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk, including:**

- \* Health-care workers
- \* Household contacts of persons at high risk for influenza-related complications
- \* Those providing regular child care to children less than 24 months of age

**New groups added this year:**

- \* Healthy children 24 months to 59 months of age
- \* Healthy adults 50 years up to and including 64 years of age

### **Influenza Vaccination Drop-In Clinics in Calgary**

Open from October 15 to December 5

Monday to Thursday: 10:30am to 8:30pm

Friday, Saturday, Sunday: 10:30am to 5:30pm

No appointments—drop in only

Sunridge Professional Building: Suite 306-2675 36<sup>th</sup> Street NE

Child Development Centre (CDC): Main Level-3820 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW  
(West end of U of C campus)

Comfort Inn & Suites South: Manchester Room, Lower Level-  
4611 MacLeod Trail South

Everyone, both eligible and not eligible, will be asked to show their Alberta Health Card and photo identification. Also please bring your English address with you.

For more information, please visit [www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/influenza](http://www.calgaryhealthregion.ca/influenza)

To speak to a health professional, contact your family doctor or speak to a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling: Calgary Health Link at 403-943-LINK(5465) or toll free at 1-866-408-LINK(5465). Mandarin Health Link 403-943-1554, Cantonese Health Link 403-943-1556.

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