

November 23, 2022

Dear parent/guardian,

Influenza season, also known as the ‘Flu’ season, is here. We want to help protect the health of children and families by decreasing the spread of influenza so that you and your children can stay safe and healthy throughout the winter season.

In the last few weeks, we have seen a large rise in cough and fever type sickness in our schools. We are concerned that this influenza season will be more severe than we have seen in years, and that illness will continue to disrupt school, sports and upcoming holiday gatherings.

The influenza season in Australia often predicts the type of season we will see in Canada. This year, Australia had a particularly severe respiratory virus season with influenza and COVID-19 rising at the same time. They saw the highest rates of influenza disease in children and teenagers, with children less than 16 years of age accounting for the majority of all influenza hospitalizations this year.

While most children who get influenza will recover without complications, some children can get very sick and need treatment in hospital. Children can also spread influenza to friends and family. H3N2, the common strain of influenza so far in Alberta, is known to cause more severe illness in young children and seniors. The influenza vaccine being used this season provides protection against the H3N2 virus.

Influenza vaccines are safe, effective and offer the best defense from serious illness. In Alberta, the annual influenza vaccine is provided free of charge, and it is recommended for all children 6 months and older. Parents are encouraged to have their children immunized against influenza. Appointments for children under five years of age and their families are available at Alberta Health Services (AHS) clinics and can be booked by calling 811 or online at: <https://bookvaccine.alberta.ca/s/booking>. Albertans five years of age and older can get their influenza vaccine at a pharmacy or participating physician clinic.

In addition to getting the vaccine, we encourage you and your child to take the following everyday actions to prevent influenza:

- stay home when feeling sick;
- if possible, avoid close contact with people who are sick;
- wash hands frequently with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds or use alcohol based hand sanitizer;
- cover your cough;

- avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands; and
- clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and items at home, especially when someone in your home is sick.

Using a well-fitting, high quality mask is encouraged, especially in crowded indoor settings. Wearing a mask can help reduce your risk of becoming sick and help protect others from being exposed. Individuals should be supported regardless of their choice to mask or not.

For children who develop respiratory illness, mild symptoms can usually be managed at home and most children recover without special treatment. Home management includes getting extra rest and drinking plenty of fluids. Parents can visit the [AHS Health, Education and Learning \(HEAL\)](#) website for advice from Alberta Pediatric Emergency Medicine experts on home management options for specific symptoms and guidance on when to seek medical care.

Thank you for everything you do to keep your families and communities healthy. Wishing you a healthy and happy winter season.

Regards,

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