

Advanced Primary Care Newsletter – September 29th, 2020



Winter is coming! Here's what you need to know for this upcoming combined **FLU AND COVID** season...

Introduction

Winter is coming and the flu season is around the corner. Though the severity of influenza varies from year to year, the flu epidemic is almost a certainty every winter. But this year, with the COVID-19 pandemic still unfolding, there is now good evidence that Canada is ALSO in the early stages of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

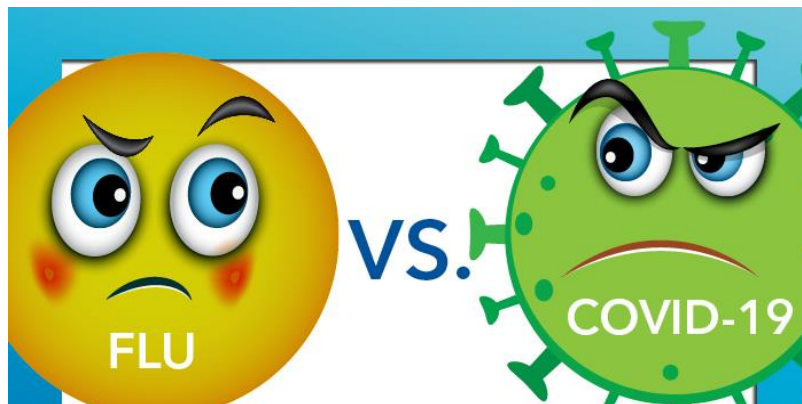
Public health officials are now concerned about the possibility of something unusual: a “**twindemic**,” with both diseases causing illness at the same time.



What are the similarities and differences between influenza and COVID-19?

Influenza and COVID-19 share many characteristics but there are some key differences between the two.

- **Same respiratory disease but different viruses**



Influenza and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. COVID-19 is caused by infection with the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and influenza is caused by infection with influenza Type A and B.

- **Signs and symptoms**

Both COVID-19 and influenza can have varying degrees of sign and symptoms, ranging from asymptomatic (no symptoms) to severe symptoms. They both share common symptoms such as:

- Fever/chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Tiredness
- Sore throat
- Runny nose
- Muscle ache
- Headache
- Diarrhea/vomiting

However, there are other symptoms such as a change in or loss of smell/taste that occurs in 15% of patients with COVID-19... and is not observed in influenza.

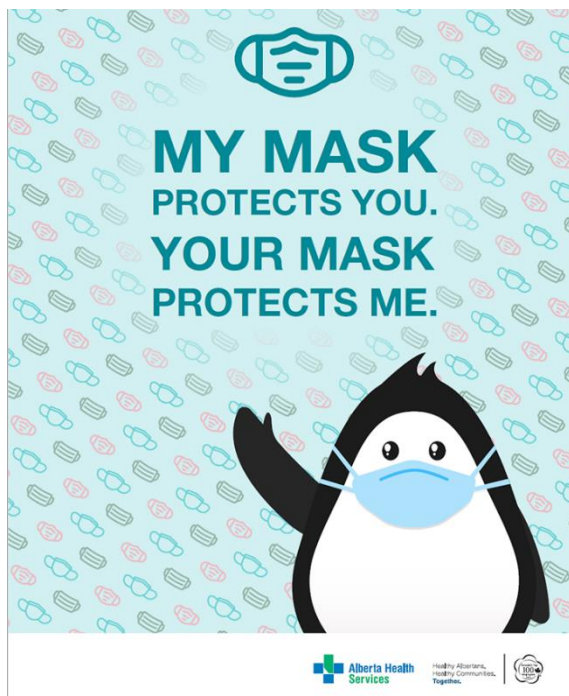
- **Incubation period**

The Incubation period is defined as interval between the time of infection to the time when symptoms occurs. While both COVID-19 and influenza can develop symptoms 1 or more days after the person is infected, in general it is shorter for influenza (1-4 days after infection) than COVID-19 (median 5 days). About 97% of those with COVID-19 will exhibit symptoms by 11.5 days but it can be as late as 14 days after being infected.

- **How contagious and how long someone can spread the virus?**

Both COVID-19 and influenza are contagious and can spread the virus at least 1 day before symptoms onset. But a person with COVID-19 is contagious for a longer period than with influenza.

With influenza, it appears to be most contagious during the initial 3-4 days and remains contagious for a total of 7 days. While COVID-19 patients can remain contagious for at least 10 days after signs and symptoms appeared.



- **Mode of transmission and driver for community transmission**

Both influenza and COVID-19 can spread from person to person via respiratory droplets made when people with the illness cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people in close contact with people who are infected.

For influenza, pre-symptomatic individuals (those who are infected but had not “yet” developed symptoms) are the main driver for community transmission. While asymptomatic individuals (those who are infected but **never** get symptoms), “super-spreaders”, are the main driver for community transmission for COVID-19.

- **Approved treatment and vaccine**

Standard **supportive care** for patients who are hospitalized for severe/ disease related complication for both influenza and COVID-19.

However, there is **no approved treatment/ vaccine** for COVID-19 but there **is approved treatment/vaccine and post-exposure prophylaxis for influenza (Tamiflu)**.

- **High risk for severe illness**

Both COVID-19 and influenza can result in severe illness and complications in certain people:

- Older adults, those 65 and older
- People with underlying medical conditions regardless of age

The difference is that the risk of complication is higher for influenza in all children less than 5 years old. However, infants and children with underlying medical conditions are at increased risk for both influenza and COVID-19.

Why this year Flu shot is so important

The Southern hemisphere’s flu season is sometimes seen as a clue to what the Northern hemisphere’s may look like. It has been mild in 2020. This should be interpreted with **caution** as this could be in part because of measures being taken to limit the spread of COVID-19 such as: social distancing, limiting crowds, mandated masks, focused COVID-19 testing. Recent increased influenza vaccination rates can also impact the severity of influenza.

COVID-19 and flu are spread the same way, so it makes sense that limiting the spread of one would help stop the spread of the other. Masking and social distancing have been unevenly enforced and followed across Canada, so their usefulness varies from province to province.

**PROTECT
US ALL.**

**Get your
FLU shot.**

In any case, colder weather means more time indoors, in closer proximity with other people, giving viruses even more opportunity to spread. And that means your risk of getting sick, whether from the flu or COVID-19, will rise in the winter.

The flu shot will not protect you against COVID-19. But it will cut your risk of flu. Last year, the effectiveness of the flu shot is about 39 percent among people who received it. If you get a flu shot and still get the flu, the vaccine will reduce your likelihood of getting severely ill from the disease and it reduces the risk of transmission to vulnerable populations, such as seniors, small children and those with underlying medical conditions.

Preventing the flu during the pandemic helps keep our hospitals from becoming overburdened. That is good for society, but it also benefits you as an individual. “When hospitals are overwhelmed, we have decreased access to care and resources for anyone who needs it”.

Even if you are healthy, you could still catch and transmit the disease. A flu vaccine could help prevent both of those things.

What to Do If You Get Sick

Most people recover from the flu without treatment, many who develop flulike symptoms would not need to see a doctor. But that practice will have to change this year because there is not an easy way to tell the difference between a case of influenza and a case of COVID-19 based solely on symptoms. The only way to distinguish accurately is through testing.



If you have vague respiratory symptoms, call your APC care team sooner rather than later, so that your care team can determine if testing is required and to provide advice.

A positive flu test means you may be a good candidate for antiviral drugs such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu). Flu antivirals are recommended for the people who are most at risk for influenza complications such as older adults, young children less than 5 years old and people with underlying health conditions. But **these drugs work best when taken within the first 48 hours of the onset of symptoms**—another reason to contact a healthcare provider when you first start feeling sick.

Getting your flu shot

At Advanced primary Care, our flu vaccination period will officially be launched on **October 19, 2020** when the flu vaccines from AHS are available. This is available for **FREE** (covered by Alberta Health Services) to all Albertans age 6 months and older. For children 8 years and younger who have never received a flu vaccine, they will need 2 doses of flu vaccine spaced at least 4 weeks apart.

People 65 and older are vulnerable to severe flu and its complications. Although seniors account for about 17% of the Canadian population but they account for 70% of flu related hospitalizations and 90% of influenza related death. This is due to a weakened immune system (Immunosenescence) with aging and an increased prevalence of chronic medical conditions with increased age.

High Dose Flu Zone (HDFZ) is designed especially for seniors and is recommended by NACI (National Advisory Committee on Immunization) on an individual basis. At APC we have HD Fluzone available to our seniors (cost of \$86.25), please call to enquire.



It is recommended that you get your flu shot in as soon as possible, as it takes approximately 2 weeks to become fully effective and you want to be protected before the season begins to ramp up. If you have a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, please inform us before you come in for your flu shot. You should wait until you are no longer contagious before seeking out the flu vaccine, to keep from potentially spreading COVID-19 while getting the shot.

It is everyone's responsibility to reduce community transmission of Influenza during the COVID-19 pandemic. ***We owe this to our vulnerable high-risk individuals, our families, and our children in the community.***

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