
STATEMENT

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Ministry of Health

Provincial health officer's statement on getting immunized before holiday season

VICTORIA – Dr. Bonnie Henry, provincial health officer, has issued the following statement on immunizations for the holiday season:

“As people in British Columbia gather to celebrate the holiday season, I encourage everyone to get their updated influenza and COVID-19 vaccines to protect themselves and their loved ones against severe illness.

“Based on the most recent epidemiological data available from the BC Centre for Disease Control, influenza levels continue to increase throughout the province. Data also indicates that the emerging dominant strain of influenza in B.C. this year is the H3N2 subtype of influenza A, which can cause more severe illness compared to other strains, particularly for older adults.

“Getting immunized is the simplest, most effective and safest way for people to protect themselves and the people around them from respiratory illness.

“In addition to getting immunized, I’d also like to remind people to follow other preventive measures, such as:

- stay away from others if you are feeling sick so you do not spread illness to others, especially those at higher risk of severe disease and complications;
- wear a mask if you are sick and cannot stay away from others, and as a personal choice;
- clean your hands regularly using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer; and
- sneeze or cough into your elbow instead of your hand.

“Everybody six months and older should get immunized now with the updated influenza vaccine, so they are best protected heading into the holiday season. Even though we are seeing a new strain of H3N2 called subclade K that is not as well-matched to the H3N2 strain in the vaccine as expected, we know from studies in other parts of the world that the vaccine still provides good protection from severe illness and hospitalization. The vaccine protects well against H1N1 and influenza B, which are also causing illness in B.C.

“While anyone can get sick from influenza, some groups are at higher risk of serious illness and complications. That includes adults 65 and older, infants and young children, pregnant individuals, people living in long-term care and those with chronic conditions. People working in essential community services, such as health-care workers and first responders, are also strongly encouraged to get immunized.

“If you or someone in the family does get sick over the holidays, make plans to postpone visits to elderly relatives or others who are at higher risk of more severe illness from influenza and other respiratory viruses. Have that important visit when everyone is feeling better.

“Notifications to book influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations have gone out through the Get Vaccinated system. Anyone not yet registered in the Get Vaccinated system can register online or phone 1-833-838-2323. Vaccines are available through public health clinics, pharmacies and some primary-care providers’ offices.”

Learn More:

B.C.’s respiratory illness immunization program and how to get vaccinated:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/respiratory-illness/responses>

Health information and services in B.C.: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/>

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