

Information current as of September 15, 2023.

The OFCP has created Fall 2023 Respiratory Illness Season **patient-directed resources** on various topics, that you can share via email, clinic signage and/or on your practice's website.

### Recommend Influenza and COVID-19 Vaccination

- ✓ Inform and educate patients about vaccines as a safe and effective strategy to reduce the risk of serious illness from COVID-19, influenza, pertussis and pneumococcus, particularly for **people older than 60 and those with health conditions** that put them at greater risk of serious illness.
- ✓ **Remind pregnant people** and people who have recently given birth:
  - Influenza and COVID-19 are more severe in pregnancy and can cause pregnancy complications such as pre-term birth.
  - Reassure that vaccines are safe and effective in pregnancy and antiviral therapies should be considered if they get sick.
  - Additional benefit of antibodies from flu and COVID-19 vaccines (as well as the pertussis vaccination) are passed to the fetus and found in breastmilk which helps to protect their baby.
- ✓ **Remind parents** that it is important for young children to receive vaccinations for flu, COVID-19 and pertussis and especially for children under five who are at greatest risk for severe outcomes and hospitalization.
- ✓ Where capacity allows, offer vaccination in your clinic and/ or encourage patients to access vaccines from your local public health unit or participating pharmacies.
- ✓ Reassure patients, parents and caregivers that **co-administration of vaccines is safe**.
- ✓ Refer vaccine-hesitant patients to **VAXFacts+**, available to anyone in Ontario.

### Identify and Engage Proactively with Your Higher-risk Patients

Aside from the specific health conditions that put people at greater risk of severe illness from flu or COVID-19, when discussing vaccines and potential antiviral treatments, it's essential to consider other patients in your practice who may also face serious complications if they get sick.

### Consider Social Determinants of Health

People from racialized groups; people living in low-income neighbourhoods; Indigenous people living on reserves; and people with overcrowded or unstable housing are more likely to experience severe outcomes from COVID-19 and influenza (flu). Other social determinants of health— food insecurity, precarious employment, lack of access to paid sick time to care for self or keep sick children home, disability, mental health conditions and substance use—can impact people's ability to care for themselves putting them at greater risk of serious illness from flu and COVID-19.

**Include these groups in your work to increase awareness, vaccine uptake and early presentation for consideration of antivirals.**

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### Ensure Higher-risk Patients are Aware of Pathways to Access Testing and Antivirals if They Get Sick

- Communicate to patients who are at higher risk the importance of reaching out early with respiratory illness.
- Discuss treatment pathways during regular appointments, and highlight alternative ways of accessing therapy (e.g., pharmacist prescribing).
- Communicate this information to patients at higher risk via by phone, email, clinic signage and/or on your practice's website.

#### High-risk patients should be encouraged to “have a plan” if they get sick:

- ✓ Keep rapid antigen tests (RATs) on-hand or know their closest **PCR testing location**.
- ✓ Use the **provincial screening tool** to access COVID-19 testing and antivirals.
- ✓ Understand the importance of accessing care as soon as possible after symptom onset.
- ✓ Have a medication list ready with up-to-date prescriptions and over-the-counter medications/supplements listed.



**Implement strategies to support timely access to COVID-19 and influenza antiviral treatments for patients at higher risk of serious illness.**

Use OCFP's tool **Screening for Respiratory Illness Symptoms** in your clinic to prioritize appointments for high-risk patients to allow timely access to antivirals.

### Help Patients Manage Their Symptoms at Home

- Reassure patients that most people with viral infections should self-isolate and manage symptoms expectantly. Share trusted resources:
  - ✓ OCFP's **Family Doctor Tips for Teens and Adults with Colds, the Flu or COVID-19**
  - ✓ OCFP's **Family Doctor Tips on Caring for Children with Respiratory Symptoms**
  - ✓ Ministry of Health resources on **protecting yourself and your loved ones from respiratory viruses and what to do if you get sick**.
- Educate patients that COVID-19 and flu antivirals are only recommended for those with risk factors for severe disease and hospitalization.
- Remind patients that if they are higher risk and do get sick—they should not delay getting medical attention so that they can access potential treatments.
- Remind patients that most people are not eligible for PCR tests.
  - If patients are using **RATs** remind them to collect a good specimen from the buccal mucosa, pharynx, and nares, and to conduct serial testing for the most accurate result.
- Advise patients on reducing the risk of transmission at home and community:
  - Remind patients who have a respiratory illness to stay at home until they have no fever and symptoms are improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours with vomiting and/or diarrhea).
  - Use high-quality and well-fitting masks, and practice good hand and respiratory hygiene,
  - Remind patients they can optimize ventilation in the home by running fans including bathroom fans, open windows, using air purifiers (e.g., homemade Corsi-Rosenthal box, HEPA filters)
- Ensure patients know are aware of your availability and after-hours services and when to call for an urgent appointment; when to contact Health 811; or when to go the emergency department.

