

October 18, 2023

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

As a parent or caregiver, I know your children's health and safety is your top priority. I want to take this opportunity to share some important information with you to help keep your child(ren) healthy this fall and into the new year.

Routine Childhood Vaccination

In Ontario, all children going to licensed childcare centres need to be vaccinated against certain diseases. The vaccines are free and are given to your child to protect them from many diseases. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, routine vaccination rates in Ottawa have decreased. That means there are many children who are missing important vaccines they need to attend childcare.

What can you do?

Check your child's vaccine record: compare the records you have with the *Publicly Funded Immunization Schedule* handout attached to this letter. This handout also lets you know how to report your child's immunizations.

Report your child's vaccine(s) to Ottawa Public Health (OPH): it is possible that your child is up to date on their vaccines, but OPH might not be aware. Your health care provider does not report your child's vaccinations to OPH, so even if your child is up to date, OPH might not know.

If your child needs a vaccine: OPH is working with the [Kids Come First Health Team](#) and other partners to make it easier to get children vaccinated. For children who don't have access to a regular health care provider, parents and caregivers can book an appointment to review their vaccine record or to get a missing vaccine. Routine childhood vaccines are also offered on a walk-in basis at our [Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs](#). For more information about routine vaccines visit: ParentinginOttawa.ca/RoutineVaccination

Fall Vaccines (Flu and COVID-19) and Respiratory Illness Season

The flu vaccine is an important vaccine for children. The flu can make children very sick and even lead to serious illness. We expect this fall and winter to be challenging with many respiratory viruses circulating at the same time – like influenza (flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and COVID-19.

Based on flu activity in countries like Australia, where the season typically starts several months before our season, we expect an earlier flu season with more children getting sick and some needing hospitalization.

It is important to think ahead and be prepared for respiratory illness season. I am sharing two important handouts to help you in the months ahead:

1. [The *Where to seek care* handout](#), endorsed by CHEO, will help you to plan ahead so that if your child gets sick, you know what you can do at home to help with symptoms. It will also help guide you about when and where to get help.

2. [The **About Respiratory Illness** handout](#), will help you better understand how to protect your family against viruses, how to reduce the spread, what to do if you have symptoms, and where to get information on treatment.

Getting your vaccines this fall, like your annual flu vaccine and the updated COVID-19 vaccine, is the best way to protect yourself and your child from getting sick. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. Effective October 11, 2023, flu vaccines and the updated COVID-19 vaccines are available for eligible residents, including:

- Individuals at high-risk for influenza (flu) and/or COVID-19 related complications or hospitalization include:
 - Residents and staff of congregate living settings (e.g., chronic care facilities, retirement homes)
 - Pregnant individuals
 - Individuals who are 65 years of age or older
 - First Nation, Inuit or Métis people and their household members
 - All children 6 months to under 5 years of age
 - Individuals 6 months of age and older with underlying health conditions per NACI
 - Members of racialized and equity-deserving communities
- Health care workers and first responders

Effective October 30, 2023, flu vaccines and the updated COVID-19 vaccines will be available for all residents.

There are many options for getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines:

- Check with your regular health care provider to see if they offer flu and COVID-19 vaccines
- Book an appointment at an [OPH Community Clinic](#)
- Visit one of our [Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs](#), if you face barriers to access, for vaccines on a walk-in basis
- Contact your local pharmacy to get your COVID-19 and/or flu vaccine(s)

Thank you for taking the time to read this important information and taking the next steps to help protect you and your family this respiratory illness season. Staying up to date on routine vaccinations, getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines this fall, and following important public health measures, like hand washing and staying home when sick, will help protect you, your family and others in our community.

For the most up-to-date information about respiratory illness, influenza (flu) vaccines, and COVID-19 vaccines, please visit our website:

OttawaPublicHealth.ca/RespVirus

OttawaPublicHealth.ca/Flu

OttawaPublicHealth.ca/COVID19Vaccine

Sincerely,



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Medical Officer of Health