

## The Relationship between Catching the Flu and Losing Your Independence

It's all too easy to put off getting the flu shot and to think that you won't get the flu, or that if you do, it won't be that bad. But every year, an average of 12,000 Canadians are hospitalized because of influenza complications, and about 3,500 die as a result.<sup>1</sup> These hospitalizations and deaths occur disproportionately in older adults and others at high risk, like those with medical conditions such as heart diseases, diabetes and lung conditions.<sup>1</sup> Because older adults are also more likely to have one or more medical conditions, they are at increased risk of influenza complications. Looking at data spanning the 2010-15 flu seasons in Ontario, in those adults 65 years and older who were hospitalized for the flu, over 65% had an underlying condition.<sup>2</sup>

A single hospitalization can have a devastating impact on an older adult's ability to fully recover. Functional declines such as loss of muscle strength and loss of independence can occur very quickly during a hospital stay.<sup>3,4</sup> Prolonged hospital stays can lead to a "cascade of dependency" where immobility leads to poor outcomes, including significant loss of ability to carry out activities of daily living. In some cases, this requires older adults to move to a long-term care home.<sup>3</sup>

But surviving the flu doesn't mean patients will go home unscathed. Studies have found that as many as one-third of older adults leave hospitals with a reduced ability to carry out their activities of daily living such as eating and dressing.<sup>5</sup> Why choose to go through this traumatic event when you can better protect yourself with the flu shot? Maintain your independence and maximize your quality of life. Getting the flu shot is the best option for preventing the flu.<sup>7</sup>

***Ask your healthcare provider for the vaccine best suited for you!***

Vaccination does not protect 100% of individuals and does not reduce the risk of complications such as hospitalization once a person gets influenza.



## References

1. Public Health Agency of Canada (2019). An Advisory Committee Statement (ACS) National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI): Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza and Interim Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2019-2020.
2. Public Health Ontario. (2017). The relationships between influenza medical risk factors and age Technical Report. Retrieved from: [https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/eRepository/Technical\\_Report\\_Influenza\\_risk\\_factors\\_age.pdf](https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/eRepository/Technical_Report_Influenza_risk_factors_age.pdf). Accessed on October 20, 2018.
3. Graf, C. (2006). Functional decline in hospitalized older adults. *The American Journal of Nursing*, 106(1), 58-67.
4. Kortebein P, Ferrando A, Lombeida J et al. Effect of 10 days of bed rest on skeletal muscle in healthy older adults. *JAMA* 2007;297:1772-4. doi:10.1001/jama.297.16.1772-b.
5. Covinsky, K.E., Palmer, R.M., Fortinsky, R.H., Counsell, S.R., Stewart, A.L., Kresevic, D., Burant, C.J., & Landefeld, C.S. (2003). Loss of independence in activities of daily living in older adults hospitalized with medical illnesses: Increased vulnerability with age. *The American Geriatrics Society*, 51, 451-458. doi: 10.1046/j.1532- 5415.2003.51152.
6. Gozalo et al. The impact of influenza on functional decline. *J Am Geriatr Soc*. 2012 July ; 60(7): 1260-1267. doi:10.1111/j.1532-5415.2012.04048.x.
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2018). Vaccination Remains Your Best Flu Protection. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/features/flu/index.html>. Accessed on October 20, 2018.