

Ministry of Health

Ministère de la Santé

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of Health, Public Health

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Swine Industry Partner:

I am writing to recommend that you and your family get vaccinated against influenza (flu) this year. The recent outbreaks of avian flu make it even more critical that you and your family are protected against flu.

Flu Vaccination Recommendations for Swine Workers

In response to the on-going avian flu A(H5N1) outbreaks in North America, Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization has highlighted the importance of seasonal flu vaccines for the 2025-2026 flu season for those likely to have significant exposure to influenza A(H5N1) through interactions with birds or mammals (such as poultry, livestock, slaughterhouse and processing plant workers, wildlife officers/researchers, and veterinarians). The Ontario Ministry of Health has prioritized anyone meeting these criteria for early access to the seasonal flu vaccine.

The strains of the flu virus covered by the vaccine are mostly human community-based infections, meaning the vaccine provides protection from contact with strains from infected individuals in your community. However, preventing the transmission of flu viruses between the human and animal populations, by getting vaccinated against the flu, is an important public health measure. It prevents the mixing of different flu strains. The mixing of flu strains can produce new flu viruses, which has the potential to cause significant disease in both humans and animals.

Although it is unusual for individuals to get flu infections directly from livestock, personal protective equipment should be worn when working with sick swine to prevent infection, as occasional human infections have been reported. Swine workers who get the flu vaccine will help to reduce the potential for human flu viruses mixing with flu viruses commonly found in Ontario's swine herds and help to keep the human viruses out of Ontario's swine herds.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) has worked with government partners to develop guidance to help prevent the transmission of flu from animals to humans. These [documents](#) are available in pdf format.

Swine Industry Workers who Develop Flu-like Illness

Individuals with flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches and, in some cases, eye infections and pneumonia) should, if possible, be kept out of barns and away from animals until 24 hours after their symptoms have resolved (48 hours for those with gastrointestinal symptoms). Individuals who develop flu-like symptoms, after working with swine that show signs of respiratory illness, should seek medical attention and inform their health care provider of their exposure to ill pigs.

The MOH is working closely with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA) to reduce the risk of flu transmission between humans and livestock. If you have any human health questions, please contact your primary care provider or your [local public health unit](#). If you have concerns about your livestock, please contact OMAFRA and/or your veterinarian.

The MOH has developed a poster which producers can print out and use at entry points to barns to help screen individuals/employees who may be infected with flu before they enter swine barns. Electronic versions of this poster, in two size formats, are available as attachments to this letter.

Practice Good Personal Hygiene

The MOH also recommends that everyone, not just swine industry workers, incorporate these simple steps into their daily routines:

- wash hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm running water after handling animals, and before eating or drinking
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze, dispose of the tissue immediately, and then clean your hands (e.g., with an alcohol-based rub)
- cough, or sneeze into your upper sleeve – not into your hands - if you don't have a tissue
- avoid sharing food, utensils, towels, or handkerchiefs
- keep an alcohol-based hand rub (gel or wipes) handy at work, home, and in your vehicle

Flu Vaccination Recommendations for all Ontarians

Flu vaccination is offered free to Ontarians over the age of six (6) months who do not have a contraindication. It is available to those who live, work, or attend school in Ontario. The vaccine is recommended for the general population.

Vaccination against the flu helps to prevent its spread through the community. Being vaccinated against the flu can help prevent serious health outcomes after contracting the disease. It also protects individuals who may be at greater risk of serious complications from the flu, such as pregnant people and those with chronic illnesses.

For more information on getting the flu vaccine, speak to your doctor, nurse practitioner, public health unit, or pharmacist. To find a flu vaccination clinic near you, please contact [your local public health unit](#).

We appreciate your assistance in helping to protect everyone in Ontario from flu.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Jodi Melnychuk

Director

Attachment