

Patient updates

Oct. 12, 2021

Dear patients,

We are writing to share about influenza (flu) vaccines and our plans for this year. In this communication, we will share information about:

- What is the flu and why it's important to get the flu vaccine
- Who is most at risk for the flu
- Can you get a flu vaccine and a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time
- Where can you get your flu vaccine this year
- How to contact us to book an appointment

At this time we do not have any flu vaccines in our clinics. We expect our first shipment on October 15. We encourage people to use pharmacies and public health clinics where they can. If you would like to book an appointment with us, please hold off calling our clinics until the week of Oct. 18.

What is the flu?

The flu is a respiratory illness that is caused by the influenza virus that infects the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. It can be easily spread to others through tiny droplets made when people cough, sneeze or talk. When these droplets land in the mouth or noses of people nearby, they can catch this virus and spread it to others. Symptoms of the flu can include, fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle or body aches, headaches, fatigue, and diarrhea and vomiting for some.

Why you should get the flu vaccine

The best protection against the flu is to get the flu vaccine every year! This will help your body build a natural defense in case you are exposed to the flu virus. Getting the vaccine will not guarantee you won't get sick, however it will reduce the symptoms and duration of illness if you do get sick. Because the virus

changes every year, it is important to get the flu vaccine yearly to help protect you from any new strains.

You cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine. If you feel unwell after your flu vaccine, this may be due to side effects from your body building an immune response, or from virus exposure before you received your vaccine.

The flu and COVID-19 are both spread the same way and have similar symptoms. The main difference is that COVID-19 can spread more easily and cause more significant negative health outcomes than the seasonal flu. It is important to get vaccinated against both the flu and COVID-19 to keep yourself safe and healthy.

In addition to getting the flu vaccine, everyone should continue to follow the recommended public health measures:

- Wash your hands often
- Cover your mouth when you sneeze or cough
- Don't touch your face
- Stay home when you are sick
- Clean (disinfect) shared surfaces or items
- Wear a face mask in public or shared indoor spaces

Who is most at risk for the flu?

Everyone is at risk of getting the flu. There are groups of people with greater risk due to health conditions, age, or where they live or work. It is important for people at greater risk to get the flu vaccine, but also important for everyone to get the flu vaccine.

When more people are vaccinated, the virus is less likely to spread and infect other people. If you are a generally healthy adult, getting the flu vaccine reduces the likelihood of you becoming sick and spreading it to others who may not be able to fight off the virus as well.

By protecting yourself, you are helping to protect your family, friends, loved ones, and community.

To learn more about symptoms, who is at most risk, and what to do if you get the flu, please review this information about [the flu](#).

Can you get flu vaccine and a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time?

Yes, you can now receive the COVID-19 vaccine and any other vaccine at the same time. This means you do not need to wait a certain amount of time between receiving a COVID-19 vaccine and any other vaccine. This update was made in late September and was approved by the National Advisory Committee on Immunizations (NACI).

Where can you get a flu vaccine this year?

Flu vaccines will be available again through pharmacies, public health clinics and our clinics. We encourage you to use pharmacies and public health clinics whenever possible. Flu vaccines will be available at pharmacies for those over the age of five. Public Health Clinics will be able to provide vaccinations to those over the age of two.

If you would like to get your flu vaccine with us, we will be opening up dedicated flu vaccine clinics at our 80 Bond location. We will also offer some evening appointments the week of Nov 1-4.

Our weekend flu vaccine clinics will include:

Oct. 30, 31- Dedicated to families with children under 5 years of age and will be Halloween themed. If you book an appointment for your child(ren), come in costume!

Nov. 6, 7- Open to family health team patients. Priority to those who have trouble accessing outside services.

Nov. 13, 14- Open to family health team patients. Priority to those who have trouble accessing outside services.

Please note: we can only provide flu vaccines to patients of the St Michael's family health team at this time.

How to contact us to book an appointment for a flu vaccine

Starting October 18, you can call or email our clinics to book an appointment. Please call your local clinic and listen to the voice prompts. If you wish to only book a flu vaccine, please press 8. Our clerical team will be happy to assist you in booking your flu vaccine with us.

We will have some local clinic options available for patients who wish to go to their home clinic. If you wish to get your flu vaccine with us, we encourage you to use our weekend and evening flu vaccine clinic options when possible. This will keep our weekday local clinic appointment available for patients who are higher risk and already in clinic for other visits.

If you have email consent on file, you can also email us to request booking a flu vaccine appointment. Please use the email: FHTBookings@smh.ca

In the email, include the following information:

- Name:
- Date of birth (MM/DD/YYYY):
- Telephone number:
- Doctor or Nurse Practitioner's name:
- Preferred date and location: *Ex: weekend clinic – Oct 30th- OR Sumac clinic week or Nov 5*
- Reason for visit: Flu vaccine

Our clerical team will do their best to accommodate requests. If you are looking to book multiple people, please include everyone's information in this email.

Still in need of COVID-19 vaccine?

To keep our flu vaccine clinics on time, **we will not be booking both Flu Vaccines and COVID-19 Vaccines in the same clinic.** If you are in need of a COVID-19 vaccine, you can call our clinics and Press 8. Our clerical team will be happy to help you book a COVID-19 vaccine appointment.

We will continue to offer our Saturday COVID-19 vaccine appointments at our 95 Homewood location. If you need your first, second or third dose, please call us to

book an appointment.

NOTE: COVID-19 vaccine third doses are still only for specific immunocompromised groups and not yet for the general population.

As we enter into the fall and head back inside, it is important to get vaccinated and continue to follow public health guidelines to protect those around you. Thank you for doing your part to keep yourself and others safe.

Take care and be well,

SMHAFHT Leadership Team