

## Ministry of Health

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## Ministère de la Santé

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October 6, 2023

Dear Animal Shelter Industry Stakeholder:

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

### **Flu vaccination recommendations for all Ontarians:**

Flu vaccines are offered free to Ontarians over the age of six months who live, work, or attend school in Ontario, and are recommended for the general population.

Vaccination helps to prevent the spread of flu viruses through the community and protects individuals who may be at greater risk of serious complications from the flu, such as pregnant people and those with chronic illnesses. Being vaccinated against the flu can help prevent serious outcomes. It also can reduce your chances of being infected with COVID-19 and the flu at the same time, which could lead to more serious complications. In most people, flu vaccines can safely be given at the same time as COVID-19 boosters, or at any time before or after (<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/national-advisory-committee-immunization-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2023-2024.html>).

### **Flu vaccination recommendations for animal shelter workers:**

While we encourage everyone in Ontario to get vaccinated, we are also recommending that those in the animal shelter industry get vaccinated because of the recent evidence that human flu viruses can infect and cause disease in dogs, cats, and other animals, as well as people.

The flu strains covered by the vaccine are human community-based infections, meaning that you are most likely to get this flu from coming into contact with infected individuals in your community. However, preventing the movement of flu viruses between the human and animal populations is an important public health measure aimed at trying to prevent the reassortment or mixing of different flu strains to produce new flu viruses, which could cause significant

disease in both people and animals. We are sending a similar letter to swine and poultry industry workers in the agricultural sector.

Animal shelter workers who get the flu vaccine will help reduce the potential for avian or mammalian flu virus mixing with these human flu viruses. With the growing movement of dogs and cats across international borders, and outbreaks of Canine Influenza A H3N2, this is becoming increasingly important.

Although it is unusual for individuals to get flu infections directly from animals, personal protective equipment should be worn when working with sick animals to prevent infection.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) has worked with government partners to develop guidance to help prevent the transmission of flu from animals to people. These documents are available in pdf format at [https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/emb/avian/Avian\\_Influenza\\_PPE\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Poultry\\_Workers\\_June\\_2022.pdf](https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/emb/avian/Avian_Influenza_PPE_Guidelines_for_Poultry_Workers_June_2022.pdf).

### **Animal shelter 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 animal kennel areas and away from shelter animals until 24 hours after their symptoms have resolved (48 hours for those with gastrointestinal symptoms).

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

Individuals who develop flu-like symptoms after working with animals showing signs of respiratory illness should seek medical attention and advise their health care provider of their exposure to sick animals.

### **Practice Good Personal Hygiene:**

The MOH also recommends that everyone, not just animal shelter workers, incorporate these simple steps into daily routines:

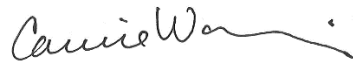
- wash hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm running water after handling birds and before eating or drinking
- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze, dispose of the tissue immediately, and then clean your hands (e.g., with an alcohol-based rub)
- if you don't have a tissue,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

The MOH is working closely with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to reduce the risk of flu transmission between humans and animals. If you have any human health questions, please contact your primary care provider or your local public health unit. If you have concerns about the animals in your shelter, please contact your veterinarian.

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

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 (a list of local public health units can be found at [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/contact/phu/phuloc\\_mn.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/contact/phu/phuloc_mn.html)).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carrie Warring". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Carrie Warring  
A/Director

Attachment



# Clean Your Hands

Respiratory illnesses like the flu spread easily between people and animals.

## Read Carefully

1. Do you have a **NEW** cough or one that has become **WORSE**?
2. Are you **SHORT** of **BREATH**?
3. Are you feeling **FEVERISH**?

If the answer to **ANY** of these questions is **YES**, please contact local facility management at \_\_\_\_\_ **before** proceeding further.