

Ministry of Health

Ministère de la Santé

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of Health, Public Health

Bureau du médecin hygiéniste en chef,
santé publique

Health Protection, Policy and
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Abattoir Industry Partner:

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

Flu Vaccination Recommendations for Abattoir 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. They do not provide protection against infection of avian flu A(H5N1) viruses. However, to prevent the transmission of flu viruses (including avian flu) between the human and animal populations, getting vaccinated against the flu is an important public health measure. It prevents the mixing of different flu strains. The mixing of different flu strains has the potential to produce new flu viruses, which could 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 animals to prevent infection, as occasional human infections have been reported.

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.

Abattoir Workers Who Develop Flu-like Illness

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. To help screen individuals/employees who may be infected with flu before they enter abattoir areas, the MOH has developed a poster which is available as an attachment to this letter.

Individuals with flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat, muscle aches and, in some cases, eye infections and pneumonia) should, if possible, be kept away from animals for 24 hours after their symptoms have resolved (48 hours for those with gastrointestinal symptoms).

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

If you have any human health questions, please contact your primary care provider or your [local public health unit](#). Any animal health questions should be directed to a veterinarian.

Practice Good Personal Hygiene

The MOH also recommends that everyone, including those who work in the abattoir industry, incorporate these simple steps into their daily routines:

- wash hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm running water after handling livestock, 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 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