

Ministry of Health

Ministère de la Santé

Office of Chief Medical Officer
of Health, Public Health

Bureau du médecin hygiéniste en chef,
santé publique

Health Protection, Policy and
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October 6th, 2025

Animal Shelter Industry Partner:

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, your team, and your family are protected against flu.

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 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.

Flu Vaccination Recommendations for Animal Shelter 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 all those who engage in occupational or recreational activities which may increase their risk of exposure to animals infected with avian flu. The Ontario Ministry of Health has prioritized individuals who may be exposed to infected animals 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, to prevent the transmission of flu viruses between the human and animal populations, getting vaccinated is an important public health measure. It prevents the mixing of different flu strains. The mixing of different 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 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 humans. These [documents](#) are available in pdf format.

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 for 24 hours after their symptoms have resolved (48 hours for those with gastrointestinal symptoms).

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.

To help screen individuals/employees at entry points to kennels and animal areas MOH has developed a poster which animal shelters can print out. 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 animal shelter 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

The MOH is working closely with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness 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.

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