

Time to prepare for winter with your annual flu shot

As we gear up for the cooler weather, it's time to think of protecting ourselves against the flu.

Influenza not only causes serious illness, it is a potential killer. Every year in Canada thousands of people die of influenza while many more suffer the effects of this serious illness. Vaccination is the single most effective means of preventing or minimizing influenza according to the National Advisory Committee on Immunization. Yearly vaccination prevents flu in about 75 per cent of people who get the flu shot. For the rest, vaccination usually reduces the severity of illness and saves lives.

Influenza is one of the most contagious viruses found; up to 30 per cent of the population may contract flu in a severe epidemic. As a result, influenza is a major cause of absenteeism in the school and workplace. The classic symptoms of influenza include a bad cough, fever, chills, burning watery eyes, aches and pains, weakness, and loss of appetite. Although other viruses like the common cold may cause similar symptoms, true influenza can be life threatening. The real danger with influenza is that complications often arise when the body's resistance is weakened. Bacterial pneumonia is the most



common complication and is particularly dangerous in the elderly. Anyone can get the flu and even in healthy people it can be severe. A case of influenza may keep the sufferer in bed for 5 to 10 days. Those

at highest risk include everyone over the age of 65 and anyone, including children, with chronic medical conditions such as heart, lung or kidney disease, diabetes, cancer or immune system disorders. Flu vaccination is strongly recommended for all individuals at high risk of serious illness. Influenza vaccine should also be considered for health care providers, essential service workers, contacts of high risk individuals, and otherwise healthy persons who wish to reduce their chances of acquiring infection.

Influenza can be prevented. An annual shot of vaccine provides a

safe and effective method of protection. The annual flu epidemic usually occurs between November and April. The best time to receive influenza vaccine is in October but receiving it late still gives effective protection. Flu vaccine is available from family doctors and is free of charge for all high risk individuals. The message is simple - if you want to avoid the flu this year visit your doctor for the annual vaccination.

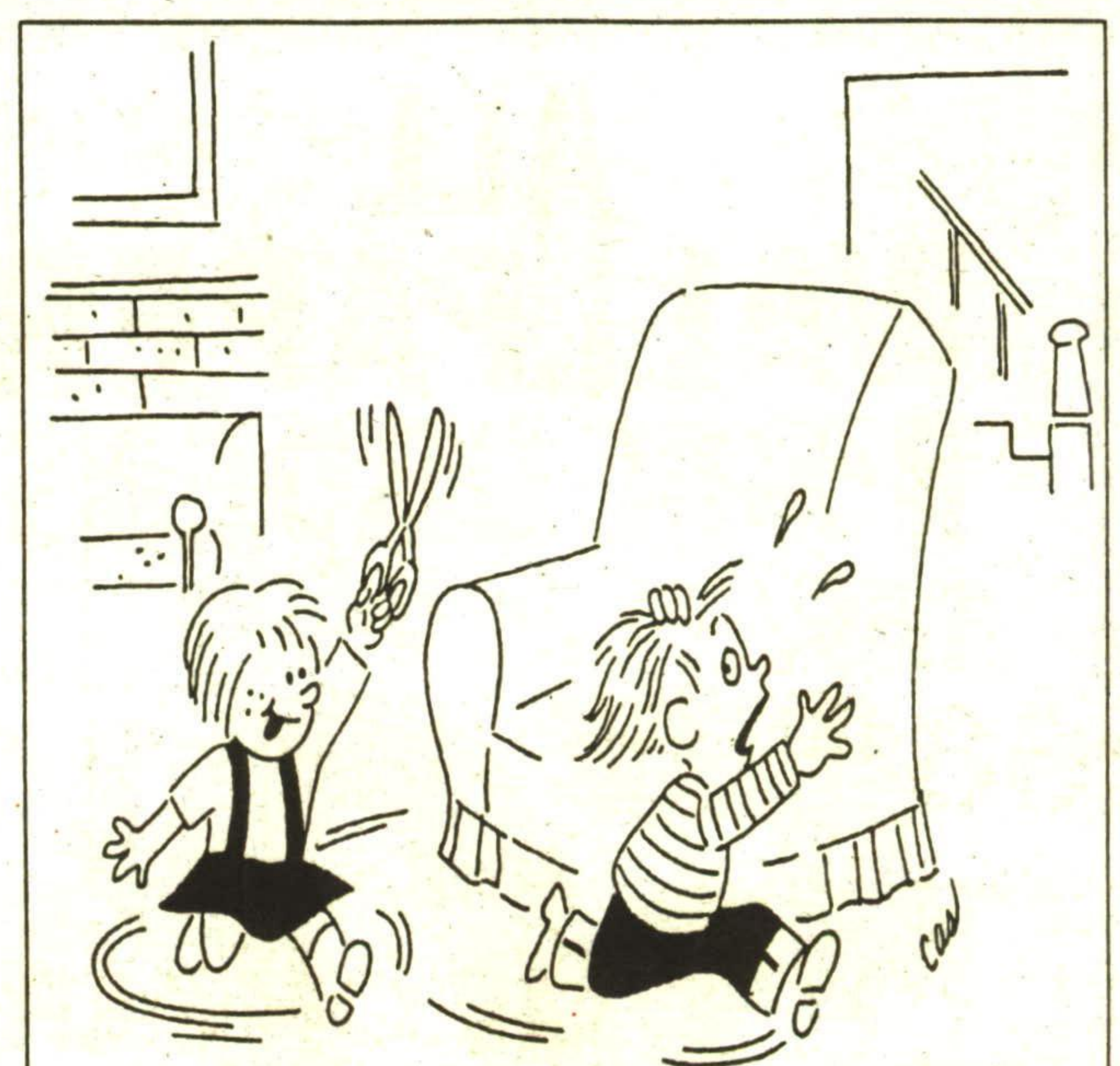
For more information about the influenza vaccine, contact your family doctor or the Halton Regional Health Department at 825-6060 and ask for the Communicable Diseases Program.



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Jaime & Nicole*



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