



## Flu vaccinations for everyone

Have you had your flu shot this year? If you live in Ontario, chances are pretty good that you did or are planning to get one soon.

Convincing people to roll up their sleeves every fall for a flu shot is a big challenge. People often forget, don't get around to it, don't like needles or just don't think it's really necessary. But vaccination is one of the most effective ways to avoid this seasonal illness, and public health officials are constantly searching for ways to get people immunized.

In 2000, the Ontario government instituted the world's first large-scale universal influenza immunization program (UIIP), offering free flu shots to all Ontarians aged six months or older. Dr. Jeff Kwong, a Canadian Institutes of Health Research-funded scientist at the University of Toronto, has been studying the impact of this pioneering program. He has found that in UIIP's first year, Ontario's flu vaccination rate for residents over the age of 12 jumped from 18% to 36%, while the vaccination rates in the rest of Canada rose from 13 to 21%.

Most other provinces offer "targeted" flu

vaccination programs, meaning that they provide free shots to health-care workers and people with a high risk of getting seriously sick if they catch the flu: the very young, the very old and people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes or heart disease. People outside of these target groups tend to opt out of getting their annual shot.

"It's true that most young, healthy people will just have a minor sickness if they catch the flu. But you have to remember that you can transmit the flu virus to people in higher risk groups," explains Kwong. "So, one excellent reason to be vaccinated is to protect the people around you."

Kwong is now studying how effective UIIP has been at preventing illness, reducing the burden on the health-care system and saving lives.

"Offering a universal program is one tool to vaccinate as many people as possible," says Kwong. "It also builds infrastructure, so that in the event of an influenza pandemic we'd be ready to vaccinate large groups of people."

—News Canada,  
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## September is Fetal Alcohol Awareness Month

### One too many... for baby's health

Of course, you already know that pregnancy and alcohol do not mix. However, what do you know about the risks and the consequences? Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Awareness Month aims to educate us a bit more on the subject. So, true or false, what do you think?

- One bottle of beer is as harmful as a glass of wine to the fetus.
- Alcohol remains in the system of the fetus longer than the mother's.
- Consuming large quantities at one time (5 drinks in one evening) is as dangerous as regular consumption (2 drinks every day).
- Exposure to alcohol can harm the fetus at any time during pregnancy.
- Alcohol consumed by the mother is also present in breast milk.
- Alcohol can cause permanent damage to a fetus.



Yes, all of these statements are true. The consequences of FAS/EAF (fetal alcohol syndrome and the effects of alcohol on the fetus) are generally quite serious. The most notable effects include slower growth, abnormal appearance, damaged internal organs, diminished intellectual capacity, behaviour problems, mental health issues, etc.

An upsetting fact is that FAS/EAF represents the main cause of mental deficiency in Canada. Yet, it is totally preventable! All pregnant women, as well as those who plan to become pregnant, must stop drinking alcohol, in any form. With no pre-set limits, abstinence is the best way to protect the health of the baby and the happiness of the entire family.

Alcohol consumed by the mother is also present in breast milk.

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