

**Kelly Lush**

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**From:** Kelly Lush  
**Sent:** September 14, 2023 12:02 PM  
**To:** Kelly Lush  
**Subject:** FW: Connecting Ontarians to The Tools They Need to Stay Healthy This Respiratory Illness Season

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**From:** Ontario News <[newsroom@ontario.ca](mailto:newsroom@ontario.ca)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 14, 2023 7:32 AM  
**To:** Jennifer White <[jwhite@huronkinloss.com](mailto:jwhite@huronkinloss.com)>  
**Subject:** Connecting Ontarians to The Tools They Need to Stay Healthy This Respiratory Illness Season



**NEWS RELEASE**

## **Connecting Ontarians to The Tools They Need to Stay Healthy This Respiratory Illness Season**

Flu, RSV and new COVID-19 XBB vaccines will be available to ensure Ontarians are protected this fall

**September 14, 2023**  
[Ministry of Health](#)

TORONTO — Ontario is reminding everyone to stay safe this respiratory illness season and prevent unnecessary visits to the hospital by staying up to date on vaccinations. Ontarians are encouraged to get their flu and COVID-19 shots as soon as they are available to them.

“Our government is making sure Ontarians can connect to tools they need to keep themselves and their loved ones safe and healthy throughout fall respiratory season,” said Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. “We are working with our partners across the health care system to continue to support hospitals and their staff while making it easier for people to access the care they need, in their community.”

Starting this month, flu shots will be available for the most vulnerable high-risk populations, including hospitalized individuals, hospital staff and residents and staff in long-term care homes, followed by those in retirement homes and other congregate settings. Free flu shots for the general public aged six months and older will be available starting October 30<sup>th</sup> at doctor and nurse practitioner offices, some public

health units and participating pharmacies. To learn more about the flu shot, visit [Ontario.ca/flu](https://Ontario.ca/flu).

It is safe and convenient to receive both the COVID-19 and flu shots at the same time, reducing the need for multiple visits to a doctor, nurse practitioner or local pharmacy. The province expects to start receiving doses of Moderna's updated SPIKEVAX XBB COVID-19 vaccine later in September, which better protects against the new Omicron XBB variant. This vaccine is Health Canada approved for people aged six months of age and older, however initial doses will be prioritized for higher risk populations and more details will be provided once doses are distributed to Ontario. The current COVID-19 vaccines will also continue to be available for Ontarians, as long as it has been a recommended six months since their previous dose.

Ontario is also rolling out its first publicly funded vaccination program of the first Health Canada approved RSV vaccine, Arexvy for those 60 years and older living in long-term care homes, Elder Care Lodges, and for some retirement home residents. New changes will soon allow pharmacists to administer the vaccine, which will allow homes to hire pharmacists to administer the vaccine on site and help vulnerable populations receive their dose more conveniently without leaving their home.

Ontario continues to provide convenient access to antivirals through physicians, nurse practitioners and pharmacists, with virtual care options available through Health 811. The Ontario government is also working on changes that will allow pharmacists to prescribe the flu antiviral, Tamiflu, making it faster and easier for people to get timely care. Individuals can also continue to access rapid antigen tests through their local Public Health Units. As of September, health care providers across the province can order rapid antigen tests to share with patients free of charge. Using the [PCR testing locator](#), [eligible individuals](#) can also access COVID-19 molecular (PCR) testing at pharmacies and assessment centres.

"It's important to remember the simple and effective ways we can protect ourselves and the most vulnerable," said Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health. "Stay up to date with your COVID-19 vaccinations, get an annual flu shot when it becomes available, stay home when you feel sick, wash your hands often and cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and consider wearing a mask, particularly if you are at high risk. COVID-19 activity is rising with new variants circulating and other seasonal respiratory illnesses are expected early this year. These small decisions are proven to have a big impact on keeping everyone in our communities safe and healthy".

With [Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care](#) and all of these additional initiatives, the government is providing Ontarians with the tools they need to stay safe and healthy this fall and winter, and avoid any unnecessary visits to the hospital. The ministry will continue to monitor trends closely and adjust as necessary.

## Quick Facts

- Vaccination to protect against flu and COVID-19 continues to be the best way for people to remain protected against severe outcomes, including hospitalization.
- Ontario will also offer respiratory virus testing to eligible, higher risk individuals, including those in long-term care homes and retirement homes.
- To ensure workforce capacity in the event of future emergencies, as of August 31, 2023, all 26 health regulatory colleges are required to have an emergency registration process that can be used to facilitate faster registration of health care workers during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Once available, you can book a COVID-19 vaccine via [our website](#) or call the Provincial Vaccine Contact Centre at 1-833-943-3900 (TTY: 1-866-797-0007 toll free) from Monday to Friday (excluding holidays) from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern time.
- For information on accessing a flu shot, please contact your health care provider, participating pharmacy or local public health unit.
- Visit [Health811 online](#) or call 811 (TTY: [1-866-797-0007](#) toll free) for health advice and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## Quotes

"Ensuring that every Ontarian has convenient access to the care they need — including critical vaccinations — is a top priority for pharmacists. Ontario's pharmacists are proud to partner with government and all our health care partners in advance of this respiratory illness season to ensure Ontarians have access to the tools and information they need to stay healthy."

**- Justin Bates**  
**CEO, Ontario Pharmacists Association**

"The Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) thanks the Government of Ontario for its work to keep Ontarians safe and healthy throughout the fall and winter months when many respiratory illnesses are circulating. These tools will not only help protect Ontarians but will also ensure the resiliency of the health care system by reducing emergency department visits and hospital admissions. The OHA looks forward to working closely together with the Ministry of Health and Ontario Health in the coming months to monitor these trends and to maintain continued access to high quality care."

**- Anthony Dale**  
**President and CEO, Ontario Hospital Association**

## Additional Resources

- Visit [Ontario.ca/flu](#) to learn more about influenza
- Visit [Ontario.ca/rsv](#) to learn more about respiratory syncytial virus

- Visit [//Ontario.ca/COVID-19](https://Ontario.ca/COVID-19) to [learn](#) more about COVID-19
- Learn more about [rapid testing for at-home use](#)
- [Your Health: A Plan for Connected and Convenient Care](#)

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