

Let's talk about:

# Healthy Aging: Flu



ST. PAUL'S HOSPITAL  
COMMUNITY FORUMS

Seniors are a population of great interest at Providence Health Care, and our research, education and clinical services are focused on innovations in health care for seniors, and partnerships with the community that contribute to healthy aging.

The Vancouver Initiative To Add Life To Years (VITALiTY) Team is a group of UBC-based researchers from a variety of health care disciplines. Our research is focused on strategies to prevent disability and promote vitality and independence in older adults. As one grows older, we accumulate chronic diseases that increase our risk of significant functional decline during an acute illness.

Every year, the flu circulates and makes thousands of Canadians sick. Those over the age of 65 are at greater risk of suffering severe complications such as pneumonia, and therefore should take some extra steps to reduce their chance of contracting the virus.

## About the Seasonal Flu (Influenza)

Human Influenza or the flu is a respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. The flu is not the same as cold, although they share many of the same symptoms. Strains circulate every year, making people sick. Influenza typically starts with a headache, chills and cough, followed rapidly by fever, loss of appetite, muscle aches and fatigue, running nose, sneezing, watery eyes and throat irritation. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur, especially in children.

Most people will recover from influenza within a week or ten days, but some - including those over 65 and adults and children with chronic conditions, such as diabetes and cancer - are at greater risk of more severe complications, such as pneumonia.

Between 4,000 and 8,000 Canadians can die of influenza and its complications annually, depending on the severity of the season.

## Key Facts on H1N1

The H1N1 flu virus is a new strain of pandemic influenza which is different than the season flu. The H1N1 flu virus emerged in April 2009 and of its spread shows that it is affecting more young and healthy people than the regular seasonal flu,

which normally affects seniors and young children. People with underlying medical conditions and pregnant women may be at a greater risk for severe illness.

## How is it spread?

The H1N1 flu virus is contagious and is spread the same way as regular seasonal influenza. This happens when an infected person coughs or sneezes and their germs enter the nose, eyes, or throat of another person. The germs can also rest on hard surfaces like counters and doorknobs, and can be picked up on hands and transmitted to the respiratory system when someone touches their mouth and/or nose. It is not possible to catch it by eating pork or pork products or through blood transfusions.

## Symptoms

Almost always: Cough and fever  
Common:  
Fatigue, Muscle aches, Sore throat, Headache  
Decreased appetite, Runny nose  
Sometimes: Nausea, Vomiting

## Flu Facts for Older Adults

- The immune system weakens as we get older
- Vaccination provides that boost to the immune system to protect against influenza
- Older adults have been exposed in childhood to H1N1 virus – this appears to provide protection against the current pandemic H1N1 virus
- Older adults remain at risk for seasonal influenza and need to get the regular flu vaccine this fall
- The flu vaccine may not prevent the flu in older adults, but it usually prevents the serious complications of influenza like pneumonia, heart attacks and strokes
- If you get the flu, take care of yourself:
  - drink plenty of fluids
  - keep moving as much as possible
  - keep up your basic self-care activities
  - be careful about spreading to others

Source: Public Health Agency of Canada  
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>

Join medical experts from Providence Health Care for monthly community forums at

St. Paul's Hospital.

Each month features a different health topic with time to pose questions to the experts.

The forums are free and take place the third Wednesday of every month.

7:00 – 9:00 pm  
(doors open at 6:30) New Lecture Theatre  
St. Paul's Hospital  
1081 Burrard Street

For more information and to register, please email [ownyourhealth@providencehealth.bc.ca](mailto:ownyourhealth@providencehealth.bc.ca) or call 604-806-8495. Light refreshments will be served.

[www.phcmedicine.ca](http://www.phcmedicine.ca)





Let's talk about:

# Healthy Aging: Falls

The risk of falling increases with age, as does the severity of injuries sustained during falls. Serious falls can drastically limit independence and quality of life.

St. Paul's Hospital has the most comprehensive falls clinic in the lower mainland: Patients receive detailed evidence-based multi-factorial falls and osteoporosis risk assessment by a geriatrician that has reduced fall risk by 20%.

## Falls by the numbers:

- 1 in 3 adults over the age of 65 fall each year
- Nearly 150,000 British Columbians over age 65 are likely to fall this year
- Half of this group falls more than once

## Injury:

- Falls are the most common cause of injury among older adults
- Half of people who fall experience a minor injury
- 5-25% experience a serious injury
- Over half of the injuries are to the back, pelvis, and lower extremity
- The risk of being injured with a fall increases with age and female gender

## Mortality:

- Falls are the 6<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death among older adults.
- 90% of hip fractures are due to falls and 1 in 5 seniors with hip fractures die within a year of the fracture

## Health care need:

- Almost 62% of injury-related hospitalizations for seniors are the result of falls.
- 40% of nursing home admissions occur as a result of falls
- The average length of a stay in hospital stay for a fall injury was 40% longer than all other reasons for hospitalization in adults > 65 years
- Reducing falls by only 20% would lead to an estimated 7,500 fewer hospitalizations and 1,800 fewer permanently disabled seniors in Canada. Estimated overall national savings would amount to \$138 million annually.

## Falls are not just accidents

- A fall in an older adult can signal the onset of an acute illness and/or the combination of

multiple chronic health issues that overwhelm a person's ability to keep their balance in certain situations

- It is the co-morbidity that becomes more common as people get older rather than age per se that contributes to fall risk
- The more risk factors that you have, the more likely you are to fall

## Risk factors for falls

- Previous falls
- Decreased:
  - Vision
  - Balance
  - Lower extremity strength
  - Cognition
  - Bladder function
- Health conditions:
  - Diabetes
  - Chronic kidney disease
  - Stroke
  - Dementia
  - Parkinson's Disease
  - Arthritis
  - Others...
- Medications
  - Sedatives and other medications that act on the central nervous system
  - Drugs that lower blood pressure (especially on standing)
  - Alcohol

## Things you can do to reduce fall risk

- Exercise
  - Lower extremity strength & balance training have the highest yield
- Prevent or manage vascular risk factors
  - Hypertension
  - Diabetes
  - Chronic kidney disease
  - Cholesterol
  - Smoking Etc
- Avoid the use of sedative medications
  - Including alcohol in excess of 14 units/week
- Discuss vitamin D supplements to treat or prevent vitamin D insufficiency with your health care provider
- Ask your physician to review your medication profile
- Avoid wearing multifocal lenses or reading glasses while walking
- Evaluate your home's safety with an occupational therapist from your health unit

St. Paul's Hospital is an acute care, teaching and research hospital located in downtown Vancouver. It is home to many world-class medical and surgical programs, including heart and lung services, HIV/AIDS and kidney care.

St. Paul's serves both the local community and patients from across BC and the Yukon. St. Paul's is one of 14 health care facilities in Vancouver operated by Providence Health Care, one of Canada's largest faith-based health care organizations. Providence's 1,000 physicians and 6,000 staff deliver compassionate care to patients and residents in British Columbia while training medical professionals and making innovative advances in research.

To support programs like this at St. Paul's, please visit [www.helpstpauls.com](http://www.helpstpauls.com) to make a donation to the Department of Medicine Academic Fund.

[www.phcmedicine.ca](http://www.phcmedicine.ca)

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