

# Older and Wiser: Getting vaccinated is only part of the plan to stay healthy this winter

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September 22 2021 By: Margaret Coates



The COVID-19 vaccine isn't the only jab seniors should be getting these days, writes columnist Margaret Coates. Flu shots are an important part of staying healthy over the winter. Getty Images

As we head into the colder, wet weather, it is time to think about how we can prepare ourselves to stay safe and well.

As part of staying healthy physically and mentally, we need to consider the adverse effects of respiratory diseases that become more prevalent in the winter months.

Though last year was relatively free of cases of flu, cold and pneumonia because of the use of masks, social distancing, lockdowns, and in some cases self-isolation, we may see a strong comeback of these infections this year. I personally enjoyed not getting sick from a flu or cold. I wondered if some of our new protocols like waving a fan on birthday candles instead of blowing them out helped as well. Of course, many of us were primarily concerned with the effects of COVID-19.

In the October 2021 edition of On Health an article states: "Experts expect that the flu will make a comeback this winter circulating along with other seasonal respiratory viruses as well as the coronavirus." In the same edition, medical experts advise: "consider vaccinations as a first line of defence."

Here at home, Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommends that everyone six months of age and older should get a yearly influenza vaccination with rare exceptions. This

means making sure to get your flu and pneumonia shots as early as possible. And most importantly, if you have not received your COVID-19 vaccination, please get on it. It saves lives.

People who get vaccinated for COVID-19 and for flu and pneumonia stand a good chance of avoiding a more serious illness, hospitalization and possibly death. We also avoid spreading these diseases to other more immune-compromised people, pregnant women, and those who don't or won't get vaccinated. Most importantly, research has shown that if after being vaccinated you do contract flu, pneumonia, or COVID-19, your risk of a serious, lengthy illness or hospitalization is reduced.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has not gone away. In British Columbia, most people have been taking the disease seriously and do not want to get sick themselves or spread the disease to someone else. Our double vaccinated population is quite high, more than 78 per cent at last count, but there are still people who will not get the jab. If you are one of those people, remember the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, as I have written above. Do it for yourself, your family, and your neighbours. Also, vaccinations are now the ticket to entry into social events and venues.

When we were expected to limit our social interactions in the last 18 months, we saw people's physical and mental health become compromised. Though these limits were necessary, it was stressful (and somewhat boring) not getting out to meet with friends or family. Some people suffered from social isolation, which as we know causes major harm to seniors.

If any of the COVID-19 variants undermine our new normal and are the cause of another shutdown, we will likely see many stressful complications. Research has shown that vaccination slows down the transmission of the disease, so a shutdown is not likely if people continue to get the jab.

The government (rightly or wrongly) has now required us to get a COVID-19 vaccination passport so we can attend non-essential gatherings like going to a concert, eating in a restaurant, grabbing a beer or glass of wine in a pub, going to your favourite gym, attending a sporting event and so on. At present, you must have at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. By Oct. 24, you must be fully vaccinated. The requirement will be in place until Jan. 31, 2022, and could be extended. For those already vaccinated, the passport is easy to obtain; just call 1-833-838-2323 or [go online to get a downloadable passport](#) on your phone. Some seniors centres have been assisting people in obtaining their passport, so check them out if you'd like some help.

Vaccination clinics for flu are starting to pop up in drugstores and in some seniors centres. Your doctor can also vaccinate you for flu and pneumonia. If you are going to get the COVID-19 jab, you can drop in to ICBC at 255 Lloyd Ave., North Vancouver. Pre-registration is encouraged, and you can do that by phoning 1-833-838-2323.

If you want to remain healthy through the fall and winter season, remember you should be receiving more than one kind of jab.