

October 23, 2023

Dear parents and caregivers,

As a parent or caregiver, I know your children's health and safety is your top priority. I want to take this opportunity to share some important information with you to help keep your children healthy throughout the school year.

Routine childhood vaccination

In Ontario, all children going to school need to be vaccinated against certain diseases. The vaccines are publicly funded and offered at no cost to eligible individuals. Vaccines are given to your child to protect them from many diseases. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, routine vaccination rates in the KFL&A region have decreased. That means there are many children and youth who are missing important vaccines they need to go to school. **What can you do?**

Check your child's vaccine record: compare the records you have with the *Immunization through the lifespan* handout attached to this letter. This handout also lets you know how to report your child's immunizations.

Report your child's vaccine(s) to KFL&A Public Health: it is possible that your child is up to date on their vaccines, but KFL&A Public Health might not be aware. Your health care provider does not report your child's vaccinations to public health, so even if your child is up to date, we might not know.

If your child needs a vaccine: For children who don't have access to a regular health care provider, parents or guardians can book an appointment to review their vaccine record or to get a missing vaccine. For more information about routine vaccines visit: kflaph.ca/immunizationclinics.

Fall vaccines (flu and COVID-19) and respiratory illness season

The flu vaccine is an important vaccine for children. The flu can make children very sick and potentially lead to serious illness. We expect this fall and winter to be challenging with many respiratory viruses circulating at the same time – like influenza (flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and COVID-19.

Based on flu activity in countries like Australia, where the season typically starts several months before our season, we expect an earlier flu season with more children getting sick and some needing hospitalization.

It is important to think ahead and be prepared for respiratory illness season. I am sharing two important handouts to help you in the months ahead:

1. The **Family Doctor Tips on Caring for Children with Respiratory Symptoms** handout, by the Ontario College of Family Physicians, will help you to plan ahead so that if your child gets sick, you know what you can do at home to help with symptoms. It will also help guide you about when and where to get help.
2. The **About respiratory illness** handout, will help you better understand how to protect your family against viruses, how to reduce the spread, what to do if you have symptoms, and where to get information on treatment.

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Getting your vaccines this fall, like your annual flu vaccine and the updated COVID-19 vaccine, is the best way to protect yourself and your child from getting sick. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. The flu vaccine and the updated COVID-19 vaccine is available now for people at greatest risk of becoming very sick such as people over 65 years of age, pregnant individuals, children under 5 years of age, individuals who are from a First Nation, Inuit or Métis community, and/or who self-identify as First Nation, Inuit, or Métis, and their household members, members of racialized and other equity deserving communities and individuals at [high risk of complications](#). Flu and COVID-19 vaccines will be more widely available to the general population on October 30.

There are many options for getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines:

- Check with your regular health care provider to see if they offer flu and COVID-19 vaccines.
- Contact a local participating pharmacy to get your COVID-19 and/or flu vaccine(s).
- For those under five years of age, book at one of our clinics, at kflaph.ca/Vaccines.

Thank you for taking the time to read this important information and taking the next steps to help protect you and your family this respiratory illness season. Staying up to date on routine vaccinations, getting your flu and COVID-19 vaccines this fall, and following important public health measures, like hand washing and staying home when sick, will help protect you, your family, and others in our community.

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