

Researchers confirm link between flu and heart attack

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Flu infection may raise risk of heart attack, particularly in first 7 days



Study confirms importance of flu vaccination for people at risk of heart disease.

Researchers looked at nearly 20,000 Ontario adult cases of lab-confirmed influenza (2009-2014) and then identified 332 patients who were hospitalized for a heart attack within one year of flu diagnosis.



For this population, the risk of heart attack was **6 times higher** within the first week of a flu diagnosis.

Factors that may be associated with more risk:

- being age 65 and older
- infection with influenza B
- no previous heart attack

The researchers say that people at risk of heart disease should take care to prevent flu through measures including handwashing and vaccination, and should not delay medical evaluation for heart symptoms, particularly in the first week of an acute respiratory infection.

Kwong JC et al. *NEJM*. 2018.

Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences
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This study confirms the importance of flu vaccination for people at risk of heart disease. Credit: ICES/PHO

Chances of a heart attack are increased six-fold during the first seven days after detection of laboratory-confirmed influenza infection, according to a new study by researchers at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES) and Public Health Ontario (PHO).

"Our findings are important because an association between influenza and [acute myocardial infarction](#) reinforces the importance of vaccination," says Dr. Jeff Kwong, a scientist at ICES and PHO and lead author of the study.

In the study published today in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the researchers found a significant association between acute respiratory infections, particularly influenza, and acute myocardial infarction.

The risk may be higher for older adults, patients with influenza B infections, and patients experiencing their first heart attack. The researchers also found elevated risk - albeit not as high as for influenza - with infection from other respiratory viruses.

"Our findings, combined with previous evidence that [influenza vaccination](#) reduces cardiovascular events and mortality, support international guidelines that advocate for [influenza immunization](#) in those at high risk of a heart attack," says Kwong.

The researchers looked at nearly 20,000 Ontario adult cases of laboratory-confirmed influenza infection from 2009 to 2014 and identified 332 patients who were hospitalized for a [heart attack](#) within one year of a laboratory-confirmed influenza diagnosis.

"People at risk of heart disease should take precautions to prevent respiratory infections, and especially influenza, through measures including vaccinations and handwashing," says Kwong.

The researchers add that patients should not delay medical evaluation for heart symptoms particularly within the first week of an [acute respiratory infection](#).

The article "Acute myocardial infarction after laboratory-confirmed

influenza infection" is published in the January 25th issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Provided by Public Health Ontario

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