

Older Canadians say they're more willing to get the flu shot in the wake of COVID-19

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The pandemic has increased older adults' willingness to receive the flu shot, new research shows.

The study analyzed [survey results](#) of 4,501 Canadians over the age of 50 from ten provinces.

Twenty per cent of 1,001 research participants aged 50 to 64 indicated they had not considered getting a [flu shot](#), but were now more likely to given the impact of COVID-19. Of these respondents, 92 per cent indicated that they had not been vaccinated against [influenza](#) the year before.

Of the 3,500 participants aged 65 and older, eight per cent reported that they had not originally planned to get a flu shot but were now more likely to receive it.

"The pandemic has been a sobering demonstration of the dangers of infectious diseases," said Nancy Waite, a professor at the School of Pharmacy and the lead author on the study. "We've seen changing perceptions of the value of vaccines and a documented change in people's willingness to consider getting vaccinated."

Participants who said they would get the influenza [vaccine](#)—both those who got it before and those who had not—cited various reasons that reinforced their decision. For some, COVID-19 has demonstrated the devastating potential of viruses, and this awareness sparked the realization that there are severe outcomes of influenza due to [risk factors](#) including age. Others also cited the increased risks due to COVID-19 and influenza circulating simultaneously, or a desire to reduce vulnerability to COVID by protecting against influenza.

Just over two per cent of 50- to 64-year-olds and 0.8 per cent of respondents 65 years and older indicated that although they had previously received the influenza vaccine, during the COVID-19 pandemic they were less likely to consider influenza vaccination. This smaller group of participants cited fear of being exposed to COVID-19

when receiving their influenza vaccination and decreased anticipated risk of contracting influenza due to social distancing, as reasons.

"It is helpful for health-care providers who have vaccine conversations with the public to understand the context in which individuals are making decisions. These contexts are fluid, and we need to answer the questions individuals currently have to help them make informed decisions," Waite said. "Our findings demonstrate that the pandemic has created new motivations for many [older adults](#) to be accepting of the [influenza vaccine](#) but has also created concerns for a small group that health care professionals should be prepared to address."

The study was recently published in the journal *Vaccines*.

Provided by University of Waterloo

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