

Flu Shots: Should they be legally required for doctors, teachers? Most Canadians say “yes”

Majority also say flu vaccines are effective, but don't actually get one

March 8, 2016 – More than 70 per cent of Canadians say professionals who work with people who are especially susceptible to influenza should have to get a flu shot every year.

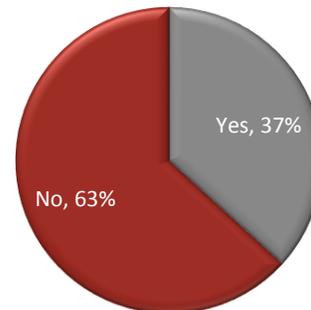
The latest polling data from the Angus Reid Institute suggests support for mandatory shots far outpaces the number of Canadians who say flu shots are effective at reducing the occurrence and severity of the virus.

This widespread support for legally mandating flu shots for certain professionals comes despite the fact that nearly two-thirds (63%) did not get vaccinated this year, and nearly half (45%) have not had a flu shot in the past five years.

Key Findings:

- In all, 37 per cent of Canadians say they got a flu shot this year; this rises to more than half (55%) among those over the age of 55
- Three-in-five Canadians believe the flu shot is generally effective, both for the individual getting it (63%) and for reducing the rate of flu the broader community (61%)
- Those who got a shot for the current flu season support mandatory vaccinations much more strongly than those who didn't

Did you get a flu shot for this year's flu season?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from February 22 – 25, 2016, among a representative randomized sample of 1,515 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

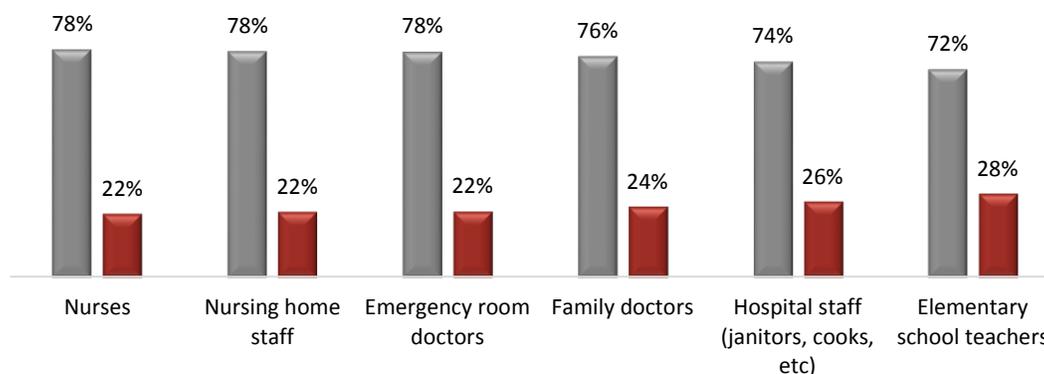
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Who should have to get a flu shot?

Should a person who works with people who are more vulnerable to the flu – young children, the elderly, or people with weakened immune systems be legally obligated to get vaccinated each flu season? Canadians answer that question with a resounding yes.

As the following graph shows, no fewer than seven-in-ten say emergency room doctors, family doctors, nurses, non-medical hospital staff, elementary school teachers, and nursing home staff should be legally required to get a flu shot:

**Please indicate whether you would support or oppose legally requiring people in each of following occupation to get a flu shot annually:
(Summary of support)**



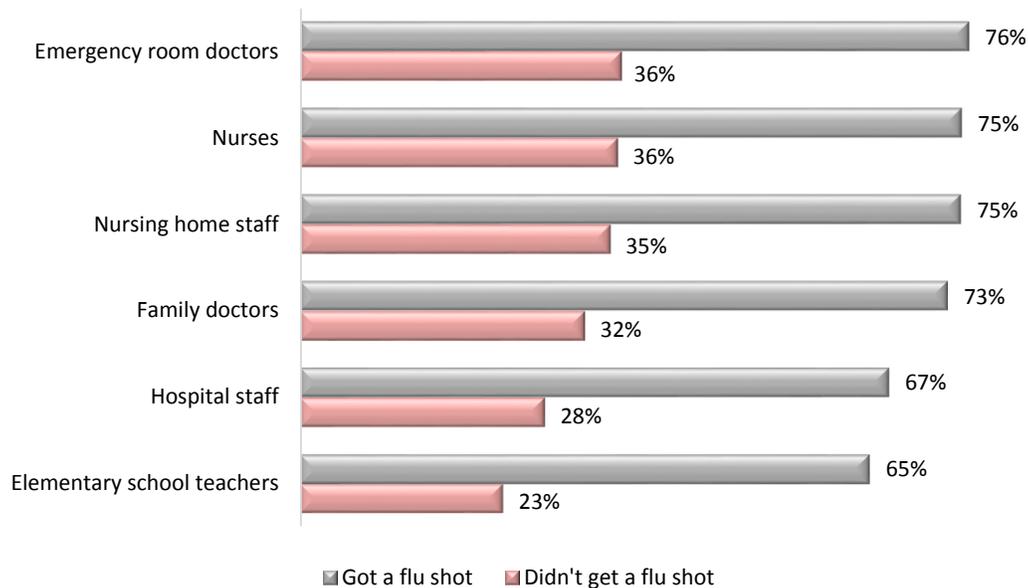
Health-care workers in British Columbia [have been required](#) to either get vaccinated or wear surgical masks during the flu season since 2012, but last year an arbitrator in Ontario [struck down a similar policy](#) implemented at a hospital in Sault Ste. Marie.

[Those opposed to mandatory “flu shot or mask” policies argue](#) that they infringe on the rights of workers, and that the influenza vaccine isn’t particularly effective at stopping the spread of the virus. Regardless of the debate around the efficacy of mandatory flu shots, however, Canadians of all ages are broadly supportive of them.

Those aged 55 and older are especially in favour. At least four-in-five respondents (80%) in this age group say flu shots should be mandatory for people in each occupation canvassed. Support for requiring flu shots for people working these six jobs also cuts across regional and gender lines ([see comprehensive tables for greater detail](#)).

Those who got a flu shot this season are at least twice as likely as those who didn’t to say they “strongly support” mandatory inoculation for each profession, as seen in the following graph:

Percentage of Canadians who "strongly support" mandatory flu shots for each profession:

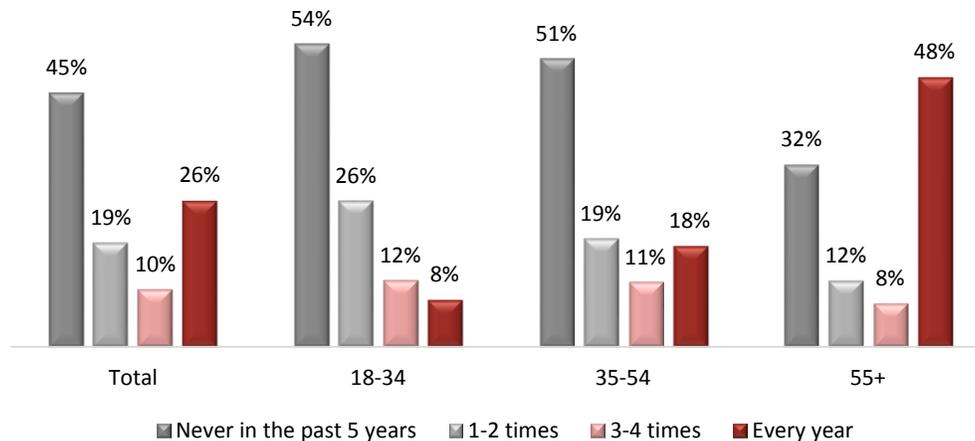


Who actually gets a flu shot?

Older Canadians are more likely than other age groups to have gotten a flu shot this winter (56% of those aged 55 or older did so), while younger Canadians (those ages 18 – 34) are especially unlikely to have been vaccinated (78% did not get a flu shot).

This pattern is borne out over the last five years. Most Canadians under age 55 haven't gotten a flu shot at all in that time, while nearly half of those 55 and older (48%) have gotten one every year:

How many times in the past 5 years have you gotten the flu shot?



Regionally, the flu shot seems to have the most uptake in Atlantic Canada. A full majority (56%) of Atlantic Canadians say they got the flu shot this year – the only region in which this is the case – and are among the Canadians most likely to have been vaccinated every year for the past five years (38% have).

At the other end of the spectrum, more than half of Quebecers (55%) say they haven't gotten a flu shot in any of the last five years – and 70 per cent did not get one this year ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

Are flu shots effective?

Medical research has found that [vaccinations are generally useful on two levels](#): First, they protect the individual person who has been inoculated against a disease. Second, they protect the broader community through "[herd immunity](#)" – the idea that if enough people are vaccinated (and the vaccine is effective), it protects even those who aren't because fewer people are contracting and transmitting the disease.

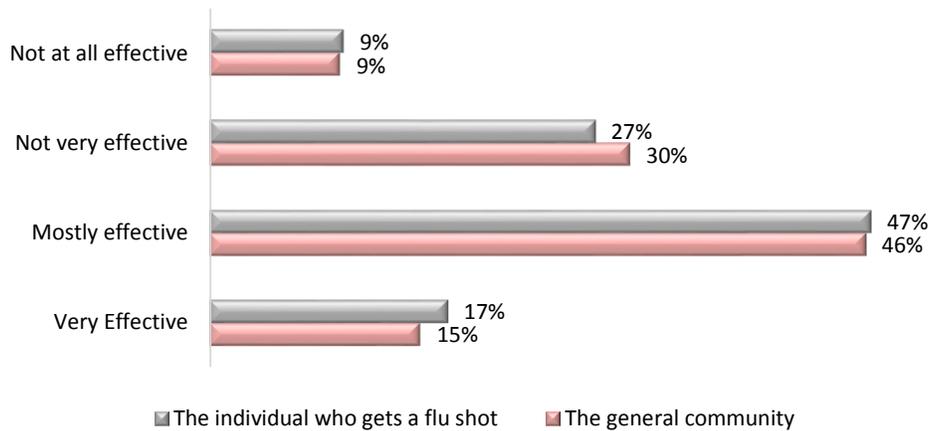
The problem past years' flu shots have faced is that they have not been particularly effective at preventing the virus. The vaccine developed for the 2014-15 flu season, for example, was [less than 23 per cent effective](#) in Canada.

Despite these problems, 63 per cent of Canadians say flu shots are either "very" or "mostly" effective at reducing the occurrence and severity of flu for the individual who gets the shot, and 61 per cent say the same of the effectiveness of the flu vaccine in the general community, as the following graph demonstrates:

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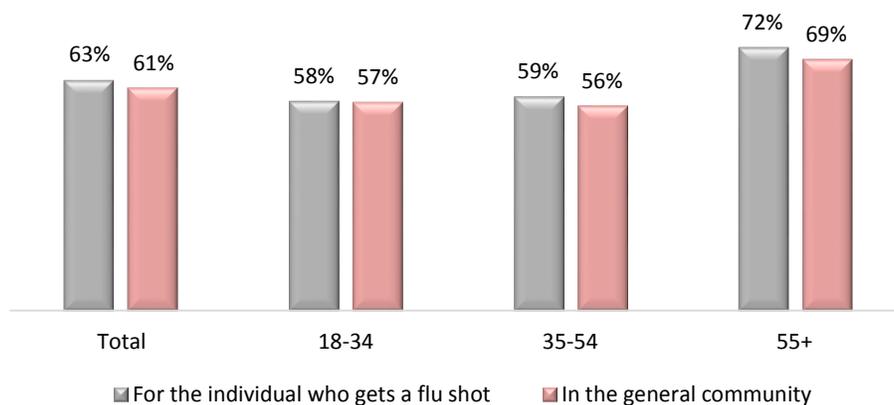
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As a general rule, do you think the flu shot is effective in reducing the occurrence and severity of flu for the following:



Perhaps unsurprisingly, given their propensity to get vaccinated annually, Canadians ages 55 and older are most likely to say flu shots are effective:

As a general rule, do you think the flu shot is effective in reducing the occurrence and severity of the flu? (those saying "effective" shown)



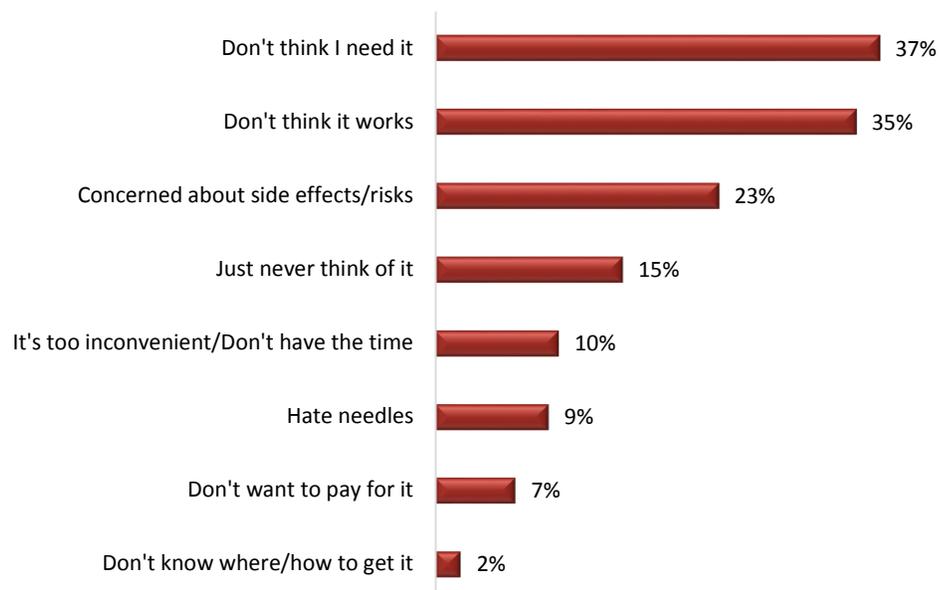
Belief in the effectiveness of flu shots is strongest in Atlantic Canada and Alberta, while British Columbians and Quebecers are most likely to say flu shots aren't effective ([see comprehensive tables](#)).

Doubts about effectiveness contribute to decision not to get a flu shot

Among those who didn't get a flu shot this season, slight majorities say the vaccine isn't effective for either the individual who gets it (53%) or the community at large (55%).

And the main reasons for not being vaccinated? Lack of efficacy, and a belief it's not needed top the list:

What would you say are the main reasons that you didn't get the flu shot? (choose up to 2; asked of those who didn't get the flu shot, n=958)



*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by age, gender, region, and other demographics, [click here](#).

Please indicate whether you support or oppose legally requiring people in each of the following professions to get a flu shot annually:			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1515)	Got a flu shot	
		Yes (557)	No (958)
Emergency room doctors			
Strongly support	51%	76%	36%
Moderately support	27%	15%	34%
Moderately oppose	11%	6%	14%
Strongly oppose	11%	3%	16%
Family doctors			
Strongly support	47%	73%	32%
Moderately support	29%	16%	36%
Moderately oppose	12%	6%	16%
Strongly oppose	12%	4%	16%
Nurses			
Strongly support	50%	75%	36%
Moderately support	28%	16%	35%
Moderately oppose	10%	5%	13%
Strongly oppose	11%	4%	16%

Please indicate whether you support or oppose legally requiring people in each of the following professions to get a flu shot annually:			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1515)	Got a flu shot	
		Yes (557)	No (958)
Hospital staff (janitors, cooks, etc.)			
Strongly support	42%	67%	28%
Moderately support	32%	22%	38%
Moderately oppose	13%	7%	17%
Strongly oppose	12%	4%	17%
Elementary school teachers			
Strongly support	38%	65%	23%
Moderately support	33%	22%	40%
Moderately oppose	15%	9%	19%
Strongly oppose	13%	4%	18%
Nursing home staff			
Strongly support	50%	75%	35%
Moderately support	28%	15%	35%
Moderately oppose	11%	6%	14%
Strongly oppose	11%	4%	16%

As a general rule, do you think the flu shot is effective in reducing the occurrence and severity of flu for each of the following?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1515)	Got a flu shot	
		Yes (557)	No (958)
In the general community			
Very Effective	15%	30%	6%
Mostly effective	46%	59%	39%
Not very effective	30%	9%	41%
Not at all effective	9%	2%	13%
For the individual who gets a flu shot			
Very Effective	17%	38%	5%
Mostly effective	47%	54%	42%
Not very effective	27%	6%	40%
Not at all effective	9%	2%	14%