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## PROVINCE LAUNCHES 2008 FLU VACCINE CAMPAIGN

First responders and health-care providers are encouraged to 'get the shot, not the flu' as part of the provincial influenza vaccine program to protect themselves and the people they care for, Healthy Living Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross announced today.

"First responders and health-care providers are often in contact with Manitobans who are at risk, making these health-care professionals an important target for the flu vaccine campaign," said Irvin-Ross. "Each individual first responder or health-care provider who gets an annual flu shot is helping to build a defensive wall against the spread of the flu."

The annual Get the Shot, Not the Flu campaign will soon be underway across Manitoba. Flu shots will be available without charge for eligible Manitobans who are considered at risk, specifically:

- Manitobans aged 65 or older and their household contacts;
- individuals of any age with a chronic illness and their household contacts;
- those who live in personal-care homes or other chronic-care facilities;
- healthy children aged six to 23 months and their household contacts;
- all pregnant women and their household contacts;
- all health-care workers; and
- all first responders including police officers, firefighters and ambulance workers.

"Emergency responders routinely come to the aid of Winnipeg citizens who are at risk. We take every precaution to protect our personnel and one example is to get a flu shot," said Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service Chief Jim Brennan. "The provincial influenza vaccine program is in place and we strongly recommend that all of our first responders protect themselves and the people around them by getting the flu shot."

All Manitobans eligible for the vaccine through the public program can be immunized at public-health clinics throughout the province during November and December or by their family doctor.

Influenza is more severe than a cold. Contracting influenza can result in severe complications such as pneumonia, hospitalization or even death. Every year, it's estimated that between 4,000 and 8,000 Canadians, mostly seniors, die from complications relating to the flu.

"The flu can be devastating, but fortunately it can be prevented," said Dr. Joel Kettner,

Manitoba's chief medical officer of health. "The flu shot is our best defence, so all eligible Manitobans should make a point of scheduling their vaccination. Influenza vaccines are considered safe and the benefits significantly outweigh the risks."

Influenza is generally spread from person to person by sneezing, coughing and other direct physical contact. Symptoms may include fever and chills, cough, headaches, muscle aches, runny nose, sore throat and exhaustion.

"The flu is easy to catch and easy to spread," said Joy Letkemann, CEO of the Lung Association, Manitoba. "In seniors, young children and people with chronic lung diseases like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, the flu can be much more serious. The flu shot is your best defence against the flu - for yourself and the people you care for."

Manitobans aged 65 and over are also eligible to get a pneumococcal shot at the same time they get their flu shot. This vaccination can prevent pneumonia, blood infection and meningitis caused by pneumococcal bacteria.

Last year, more than 227,000 Manitobans received influenza vaccines. More information about flu shots and influenza symptoms is available at [www.gov.mb.ca/health/flu/index.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/flu/index.html).