



## **Module 3 : Learning to make informed health decisions as an older adult.**

Ensuring older adults can make informed and empowered decisions on their health.

### **About this module**

To culminate the e-module course on influenza vaccination, users will be guided through the different factors that may affect their decision in receiving a vaccine against influenza. Information will be provided to older Canadians to ensure they are informed on the most efficient and safest protection against influenza and empowered in discussions with healthcare providers (HCPs).





### **Lessons**

- Ensuring older adults can make informed and empowered decisions on their health.

### **Learning Objectives**

1. In this module, individuals will learn how older Canadians can use information provided in the previous modules to inform their decisions in receiving an influenza vaccine and understand how to advocate for themselves with their health care providers.



## **Lesson 1: Ensuring older adults can make informed and empowered decisions on their health.**

**Learning Objective 1: In this module, individuals will learn how older Canadians can take information provided in the previous modules and use it to inform their decisions in receiving an influenza vaccine and understand how to advocate for themselves with their health care providers.**

### **In relation to our health, what is informed decision-making?**

- Informed decision-making means that individuals are making decisions surrounding their health on the basis of receiving all relevant information of the issue, such as
  - **diagnosis** (the identification of a disease or condition), risks and outcomes of the disease
  - **prognosis** (the likely course of a disease or illness)
  - prevention and treatment options (with advantages and risks outlined).

### **In relation to our health, what is informed decision-making?**

- Factors that should be considered when making health decisions include:
  - Overall health status including if they have other diseases (i.e. heart disease, diabetes, etc)
  - Environmental factors (i.e. housing, pollution, water and food quality and safety, etc)
  - Age group
  - Accessibility to health care resources (including health care providers, diagnosis and treatment options, and proximity to health care settings)
  - Cultural values and belief systems

- To aid in this process, there are other factors that should also be considered such as:
  - Language, which may present as a barrier to a complete understanding of health information.
    - This can limit an individual's ability to make an informed decision.
    - Some solutions to a language barrier include using a trusted translator, which may include a family member or friend, or reading resources that are available in a given language.
  - **Health literacy**, which is the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions.
    - This is something that can be improved at an individual level and societal level with continued learning and teaching.

### **What is misinformation and disinformation?**

- Misinformation and disinformation are both considered to be forms of information that can cause harm.
- **Misinformation** refers to false information that is not intended to cause harm.
- **Disinformation** refers to false information that is intended to manipulate, cause damage, and guide people, organizations, and countries in the wrong direction.
- Misinformation and disinformation have affected our ability to improve public health as it has contributed to reduced trust in health care professionals and public health responders, increased belief in false cures to medical issues, politicized public health countermeasures for decreasing disease transmission, and reduced uptake of life-saving therapies, such as vaccination.



## **To help make informed decisions on our health, what sources of information are deemed trustworthy?**

- It is critical that individuals are making decisions centered on evidence-based information that come from sources that are trusted.
- In general, when it comes to health, it is important to consult with health care professionals.
- There are many different types of health care professionals all with different specialties, and when it comes to vaccination, it is helpful to speak to a family physician, nurse practitioner, registered nurse, or public health care unit.
- Public health in Canada is a combination of programs, services, and policies that protect and promote the health of all Canadians.
- In Canada, public health is managed by municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal governments, alongside Indigenous authorities and organizations, hospitals, universities, and other organizations involved in promoting and protecting public health.
- Generally, programs and services are provided through regional public health units or centers. These units or centers have a comprehensive understanding of public health with a regional context and can provide important and informative resources that reflect health options available in a specific municipality of a province or territory.
- Therefore, Canadians should also consult with their public health units to help make informed decisions on their health and vaccination. As vaccination is one of public health's top priorities to ensure diseases are not spreading across a population, the health care providers working in these units will have great knowledge to support your decisions.



- While there is an abundance of information available online, it is important to understand the source from which this information is coming from.
  - Sources that are coming from the government, an academic institution, a clinical setting such as a hospital or public health center, are often trustworthy.
  - Though this is true, it is important to have a meaningful and informative discussion with a health care provider before following through with any course of action related to your health.
    - It is important to have a clear understanding before proceeding with health-related decisions.

**Here are some helpful questions to help think critically when encountering new health-related information.**

- Is this content reliable?
- Who is the author of this content?
- What is the source of these health claims?
- Is the outlet that this information coming from reliable?
- What feelings does this information provoke?
- Regardless of whether there is a feeling of confidence, doubt, or fear about the information or content, consultation with a health care professional is always advised.

## What is needed to feel empowered when talking to a healthcare provider in general?

- First and foremost, individuals should always feel safe and heard when discussing any issues related to health and well-being.
- Individuals will differ in their reliance on recommendations made by health care professionals.
  - Regardless of how engaged individuals may be, healthcare professionals have a duty to communicate in an open dialogue and work with individuals to ensure they are informed.
- It is therefore important for individuals to receive all of the information needed to make a decision about their health in a manner that is empathetic and respectful to all concerns.
- When making informed decisions specific to influenza vaccines, there are some important considerations to ensure that older adults are empowered in this process.
- These considerations include:
  - Understanding the increased risks that come with **immunosenescence** (ageing-related changes to the effectiveness of the immune system), overall health, presence of other diseases and environmental factors such as close proximity to others.
- Individuals should understand:
  - The level of risks that come from infection with influenza.
  - The risks and benefits of influenza vaccines, according to the different types available.

- Additionally, it is important to note the below factors that may impact the decision to be vaccinated:
  - Influenza vaccine recommendations by provinces and territories for different age groups.
  - There is a choice and right to be protected against influenza and to protect others by preventing spread of the disease.
  - Individuals can and should take the time to consider all the information presented to them, on their own time away from a health care setting.

### **Understanding NACI recommendations to help guide informed decision-making**

- As highlighted in the previous module, NACI recommendations are a major source of information on different vaccines, including influenza vaccines.
- NACI sometimes provides individual level and programmatic (population-level) recommendations for different vaccines.
- It can be helpful to understand the differences between these types of NACI recommendations to help make an informed decision on receiving a vaccination.
- Recommendations for individual-level decision making
  - These types of recommendations provided by NACI, are intended for people wishing to protect themselves from a particular disease, such as influenza or for vaccine providers wishing to advise individual patients on the prevention of influenza.



- Recommendations for public health program-level decision making
  - These types of recommendations provided by NACI, are intended for provinces and territories responsible for making decisions on publicly funded immunization programs. There are important factors to consider when recommending a vaccine for a population versus an individual, such as population demographics and economic considerations.

Understanding NACI recommendations to help guide informed decision-making NACI guidelines and recommendations for influenza are subject to change on a yearly basis.

- To know what changes have been made and what may impact you specifically, it is a good idea to check NACI's statement every year.
- You can find their statement on influenza and other diseases at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci.html>

(You can access this link in the resources for this course)

