

SEPTEMBER | [PERSONALHEALTHNEWS.CA](http://PERSONALHEALTHNEWS.CA)

# IMMUNE HEALTH

## WHY THESE PARENTS ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT FLU SHOT ADVOCACY

Whenever she sees a dandelion, Jill Promoli reminisces about life with her son, Jude. She remembers how the toddler's face lit up and he chuckled when he came across the weed because it resembled a hat his mother had knitted for him — a hat in the shape of a lion's head. She also remembers that her son died a few weeks later of influenza. "Jude was a little troublemaker, so funny and smart," she says wistfully. "He was really special."

In the months after his death, Promoli channeled her grief into advocacy work. She and her husband, Craig, started a campaign to foster awareness of the danger of influenza and the importance of getting the flu shot — an effort to help others avoid the grief they had endured.

### Flu not a benign condition

After Jude's older sister, Isla, and twin brother, Thomas, came down with the flu in May 2016, Jude ran a low-grade fever. Promoli kept him home from school in their Toronto suburb. She gave him Tylenol, which brought down his temperature. He and Thomas, who had also stayed home from school, enjoyed some quiet playtime and then went to their bedroom to nap.

When Promoli went in to wake them up, Thomas jumped out of bed. Jude didn't move. Her son wasn't breathing and he was non-responsive. "I called 9-1-1 and ran into the street shouting for help," she recalls. "My neighbours came running. I did chest compressions until emergency responders arrived." They did their best to save the toddler but it was no use. An

hour later, Jude was pronounced dead at the hospital.

Four months later, Promoli and her husband received the results of the autopsy. It indicated that influenza alone had stopped the little boy's heart. The couple was shocked; all three of their kids had been vaccinated against the flu. They did some research and were surprised by what they learned about influenza and the flu shot.



Influenza is not a benign condition, as many people assume. It kills between 250,000 and 500,000 people worldwide yearly and is one of the leading causes of deaths in Canada. The highest-risk group includes infants, the elderly, and people with impaired immune systems.

Because influenza viruses mutate, vaccines are given annually. Their effectiveness varies from year to year — they aren't fail-safe — but they reduce influenza deaths and hospitalizations. The flu vaccine doesn't just help the recipient, Promoli notes, it helps the community.

### Flu shot is "about everyone around us"

"If more people had gotten flu shots that winter, influenza might not have spread through Isla's school and my kids might not have gotten sick," Promoli says. "Jude might be alive today." The flu had a mild effect on Isla and Thomas that spring, and Jill believes that's because they had been vaccinated.

"If you get the flu shot, there is a 40 to 60 percent chance you won't get the flu at all," Promoli says, "and if you do get the flu, it will be less severe, so you'll likely recover more quickly. The flu shot is not just about us. It's about everyone around us."

Federal government guidelines recommend that every person six months and older get a flu vaccine annually. Health care providers across the country have endorsed those guidelines, and Promoli is taking steps to convince all Canadians to get onboard. Her website, For Jude, For Everyone, offers a wealth of information about the flu vaccine and it has made an impression on many visitors. Among those is Dr. Jane Philpott, Canada's Minister of Indigenous Services. Promoli met with Philpott in January, when the doctor was Minister of Health.

Jude would have turned three years old that week. "We want to do something to honour his life," Promoli says, when asked why she is so committed to her advocacy work. "He's gone. All we can do now is try to help other people." ■

Randi Druzin

Visit [forjudeforeveryone.com](http://forjudeforeveryone.com) to learn more about Jude's story.

