

INFLUENZA VACCINE Fact Sheet

You need to get a flu shot every year

The viruses that cause the flu are continually changing. Each year, the World Health Organization identifies three strains of the influenza virus that are predicted to be the most common the following winter and therefore will have the most impact on our health. Influenza vaccines are then developed based on these three strains. Since these change from year to year, you need an annual flu shot to make sure your body forms antibodies against the new flu viruses.

The best time to get your shot is from October to December. However, vaccinations will be provided anytime during the current influenza season, from October to March.

Who should, or should not, get a flu shot

The flu shot is recommended for anyone who wants protection from influenza.

The flu shot is provided free of charge for the following people at high risk:

- people of any age living in a nursing home, lodge or chronic care facility;
- people 65 years of age and older;
- children 6 to 23 months;
- family members and regular caregivers of children under 24 months;
- adults and children with chronic conditions including heart conditions, diabetes, asthma, cancer, etc;
- people who are HIV positive;
- pregnant women who are at high risk;
- all those living with persons at high risk; and
- health care workers and other personnel in contact with those at high risk;
- worker's in direct contact with poultry infected with avian influenza during culling operations.

For medical reasons, some people should not get a flu shot. These include:

- people who have severe allergies to eggs (chicken eggs are used in the production of the vaccine);
- people who have had a severe allergic reaction to a previous flu vaccine; and
- children under six months of age.

If you have a fever on the day of your flu shot, wait until the fever has gone.

The vaccine works

As with any vaccine, vaccination may not protect 100 per cent of all individuals. However, the influenza vaccination has been shown to prevent illness in approximately 70 to 90 per cent of healthy children and adults.

Vaccine safety

Influenza vaccine is very safe, but like any medication, side effects can occur. Most people who get the vaccine have either no side effects or mild effects such as soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given. Some people may get a fever or muscle-aches that start shortly after vaccination and may last 1-2 days. If you experience difficulty breathing within 2-24 hours of your vaccination, call your doctor immediately. Severe allergic reactions are extremely rare. If they do occur it is within a few minutes to a few hours after vaccination.

Where to get your flu shot

Call your local clinic, regional health authority or Health Link Alberta toll-free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465) or visit Alberta Health and Wellness' Web site at www.health.gov.ab.ca