



Influenza

Saskatchewan Immunization Program

What is influenza (flu)?

- Influenza is a contagious disease of the respiratory tract. It is caused by a virus.
- Influenza is spread by coughing, sneezing or direct contact. Good hygiene (i.e., hand washing) is an important way to prevent the spread of influenza.
- Symptoms of influenza include sudden fever, chills, muscle aches and cough.
- Influenza occurs in Canada every year during late fall and winter months.
- Immunization against influenza is encouraged for healthy adults and children.
- The Public Health Nurse will help international travellers to determine their risk.

What does influenza vaccine contain?

- Three inactivated strains of influenza (two strains of influenza A and one strain of influenza B).
- It does not contain live virus.
- Influenza vaccine contains egg protein, thimerosal, formaldehyde, and sodium deoxycholate; Triton X-100 and trace amounts of sucrose and neomycin may also be present.
- Influenza vaccine packaging does not contain latex.

Who can get the vaccine free of charge in Saskatchewan?

- People 65 years of age or older.
- Children 6 to 23 months of age.
- Adults and children with chronic heart or lung disorders.

- Adults and children with chronic conditions, such as diabetes and other metabolic diseases, cancer, immunodeficiency, renal disease, immunosuppression, anemia and hemoglobinopathy.
- People of any age who are residents of nursing homes and/or special care homes.
- Adults and children who have any condition that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of respiratory secretions or that can increase the risk of aspiration (examples include conditions such as muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis and acquired brain disorders).
- Children and youth from 24 months to 18 years of age who have been treated for a long period of time on acetylsalicylic acid (ASA).
- Individuals directly involved in the destruction of poultry infected with avian influenza (bird flu).

Who should not receive the vaccine?

- Infants younger than 6 months of age (vaccine is ineffective).
- People who have had a life-threatening allergic reaction to any component of the vaccine.
- People with moderate to severe illness, with or without fever, should delay immunization.
- People who have developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS, a neurological disorder) within 6-8 weeks of having received influenza vaccine.

When should the vaccine be given?

- For Canadian residents, annually, in the fall.
- Children under 9 years of age require two doses, one month apart if they have not received influenza vaccine before.
- May be given safely with other vaccines.

How is the vaccine given?

- By injection into a muscle.

How effective is the vaccine?

- Immunization prevents influenza illness in about 70-90% of healthy children and adults.
- Studies involving long-term care residents have shown influenza vaccine to be 50-60% effective in preventing hospitalizations and up to 85% in preventing deaths.
- Effectiveness varies depending on the age and immunity of the person being immunized, and the match between the vaccine given and the influenza strain circulating in the community.
- Antibody protection usually begins within 7-14 days after immunization in the majority of healthy children and adults.

What might be felt after receiving the vaccine?

- Local reactions may include:
 - soreness, redness, swelling or bruising at the injection site; and
 - limited movement of the immunized limb.
- Other reactions may include:
 - headache;
 - fever;
 - muscle aches;
 - loss of appetite;
 - chills;
 - nausea;
 - vomiting;
 - diarrhea; and
 - body rash/redness.

- Oculo-respiratory syndrome (ORS) has been reported in past influenza seasons. Tell your doctor or public health nurse if, following influenza vaccination, you have experienced red eyes, respiratory problems (difficulty breathing, cough, wheeze, chest tightness, sore throat) or facial swelling.
- Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) may occur in about 1/1,000,000 immunizations – a clear link has not been accepted or rejected.
- Severe reactions are rare. As with any medicine, vaccines carry a small risk of a serious reaction. These reactions could include difficulty breathing, shock, or death.

Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse or your doctor as soon as possible.
- Talk to your public health nurse if:
 - you have questions or concerns about your reaction or your child's reaction to immunization.
 - you or your child had to go to your doctor, hospital or health centre with an illness that might be related to immunization.

Your immunization information will be recorded in a computerized system known as the Saskatchewan Immunization Management System (SIMS). Information collected in SIMS may be used to:

- *manage immunization records,*
- *notify you if you or your child needs an immunization,*
- *and monitor how well vaccines work in preventing vaccine preventable diseases.*

Your immunization records may also be shared with health care professionals in order to provide public health services; assist with diagnosis and treatment; and to control the spread of vaccine preventable diseases.

***For more information contact:
your local public health office,
OR your physician,
OR the HealthLine at 1-877-800-0002***

References: Canadian Immunization Guide 6th ed., 2002; Red Book 2003; Product Monographs