

## Influenza (Flu) Vaccine

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

### What is influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine protects against viruses that cause influenza, often called the flu. The vaccine does not protect against other viruses or bacteria that cause colds or stomach illness, such as 'stomach flu'. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

In BC, the vaccine is available every year starting in October or early November. It is best to get it by the end of November to give your body enough time - about two weeks - to build immunity before the influenza season starts. However, the vaccine can offer protection from influenza if received at any time during the influenza season, which usually occurs from November to April.

### Who should get the vaccine?

In BC, the influenza vaccine is provided free to the following groups of people.

#### People at high risk of serious illness from influenza:

- Children 6-23 months of age
- Pregnant women who will be in their third trimester during the influenza season
- Seniors 65 years and older
- Residents of any age living in residential care, assisted living or other group facilities
- Children and teenagers taking Aspirin® or ASA for long periods of time
- Children and adults with certain medical conditions, including:
  - Heart or lung disorders that require regular medical care, including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cystic fibrosis
  - Kidney disease, diabetes, cancer, anemia, or weakened immune systems
  - Those with health concerns causing difficulty breathing, swallowing, or a risk of choking on food or fluids (including persons with severe

brain damage, spinal cord injury, seizures or neuromuscular disorders).

#### People able to transmit or spread influenza to those at high risk of serious illness from influenza, including:

- Doctors, nurses and other care providers who work in hospitals, residential care, assisted living or other group facilities
- Household contacts, caregivers and daycare staff of children under 24 months of age
- Household contacts of people at high risk
- People who live or work in confined settings such as correctional facilities.

#### Others:

- People who provide essential community services, such as police officers, firefighters and ambulance attendants
- Farmers and other people who work with live chickens or pigs.

The vaccine is given as one dose or shot. Children under 9 years of age who have never had an influenza vaccine need two doses. This is very important to make sure the vaccine protects them.

The vaccine is also recommended, but is not provided free, for healthy people 2 to 64 years of age. Anyone not eligible for a free influenza vaccine can purchase it at some public health units, doctors' offices and clinics. Some employers also provide free vaccine to employees.

### Benefits of Influenza Vaccine

The vaccine is the best way to protect against influenza infection, a serious and sometimes fatal disease. When you get vaccinated, you help protect others as well.

### Possible Reactions after the Vaccine

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer to get the influenza vaccine than to get influenza.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the shot was given. In some people, symptoms can include mild fever, headache and aching muscles starting 6 to 12 hours after getting the vaccine and lasting about 1 to 2 days. Influenza vaccine cannot cause the flu because it does not contain live virus.

Acetaminophen or Tylenol® can be given for fever or soreness. ASA or Aspirin® should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue, or lips. If this happens after leaving the clinic, call 911 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and occurs in less than one in a million people who get the vaccine.

### **Report serious or unexpected reactions to your public health nurse or doctor.**

During the 2000 influenza season, some people who got the influenza vaccine had a reaction called oculo-respiratory syndrome (ORS). ORS involved eye redness, and in some people, a cough, sore throat or breathing symptoms. Most people who had ORS can be safely vaccinated again and there have been few reports since 2000. However, people who had severe reactions should talk to a doctor or local health unit before getting another influenza shot.

### **Who should not get the influenza vaccine?**

Speak with a public health nurse or doctor if you:

- Has had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of influenza vaccine, or any component of the vaccine
- Developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 8 weeks of getting any influenza vaccine. GBS is a rare condition that can result in weakness and paralysis of the body's muscles.
- You have a serious allergy to eggs.

Children less than 6 months of age should not get the influenza vaccine because it is not known to be effective at this age.

### **What is influenza?**

Influenza, often called the flu, is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by the influenza virus. A person with influenza is at risk of other infections, including viral or bacterial pneumonia (infection of the lungs). In Canada, it is estimated that up to 7,000 people a year die from influenza and its complications.

Influenza spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing, or having close face-to-face contact. The virus can also be spread when a person touches an object contaminated with the influenza virus and then touches his or her own mouth or nose.

### **Mature Minor Consent**

Effort is made to seek parental or guardian consent prior to immunization. Children under the age of 19 who are able to understand the risks and benefits may consent to or refuse immunizations, regardless of the parent's or guardian's wishes. It is recommended that parents/guardians and their minor children discuss immunizations beforehand, and ask the nurse or doctor any questions.

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- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

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