
Seasonal Influenza (Flu) Vaccine

Who should get the seasonal flu vaccine?

- The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), which advises the Public Health Agency of Canada, recommends **annual seasonal flu vaccination for everyone 6 months of age and older**. It is especially recommended for people at high risk for complications of flu, those who may spread the flu to high risk people, and those who provide essential community services.

What is influenza (flu)?

- Influenza (commonly known as “the flu”) is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by the influenza virus.
- It causes high fever, headache, loss of appetite, muscle aches, weakness, chills, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion and sneezing. It is much worse than the common cold, and usually lasts 5 to 10 days. The cough and fatigue can last for many weeks, making the return to normal activities difficult.
- The flu can be a serious illness for some people. It can lead to pneumonia, hospitalization, and even death especially among people over the age of 65 and those under 2 years of age. People with chronic medical conditions such as heart or lung problems or diabetes are also at higher risk of these complications.
- Pregnant women are also at higher risk of complications from influenza.

How is influenza spread?

- The flu spreads easily from infected persons through coughing and sneezing, or by touching contaminated surfaces such as toys, doorknobs, eating utensils, and unwashed hands.
- You may not know at first that you have the flu virus. It may be a day or even a week before you get sick, and in that time you can spread the flu to others.

How well does the seasonal flu vaccine protect against the flu?

- The seasonal flu vaccine contains three strains of flu virus. The vaccine is updated yearly with the most current circulating strains.
- With a good match between the strains in the vaccine and those in circulation, the vaccine is 70% to 90% effective in preventing the flu in healthy children and adults and may protect them for up to one year.
- Even if you do get the flu, vaccinated people usually have milder symptoms.
- It takes about 2 weeks after the vaccination to develop protection against the flu.
- A seasonal flu vaccination will not protect you against the H1N1 flu virus.

When should the seasonal flu vaccine be given?

- Vaccination is needed every year and is recommended before flu reaches the community, but can be given even after there is flu activity. It is also recommended for those travelling to destinations where seasonal flu is likely to be circulating.
- Children under 9 years old require two doses of vaccine given at least four weeks apart if they are receiving seasonal influenza vaccine for the first time. They are then recommended to receive one dose per season in the following years.

Is the seasonal flu vaccine safe? Are there any side effects?

- The vaccine cannot give you influenza because it does not contain live virus.
- The vaccine, like any medicine, can cause side effects, however the risk of the vaccine causing serious harm is extremely small.
- Most people who receive the vaccine have either no side effects or mild side effects such as soreness, redness, or swelling at the spot where the needle was given. Some people may get a fever or muscle aches within 6 to 12 hours after getting the vaccine. These symptoms may last about 1 to 2 days.
- If you develop red eyes and any respiratory symptom (e.g., cough, wheeze, difficulty breathing, hoarseness, sore throat) with or without facial swelling within 24 hours after receiving your flu vaccination, **please report this to your doctor and Niagara Region Public Health.**
- Contact your doctor or go to the nearest emergency room immediately if you experience any of these other symptoms:
 - high fever (over 101°F or 38.5°C)
 - lasting or worsening weakness
 - hives
 - dizziness
 - swelling of the lips, tongue, or face
 - convulsions
 - trouble breathing
 - other serious problems

Who should NOT get the vaccine?

The flu vaccine will not be given to anyone who:

- has had a severe allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past.
- has a severe allergy to any part of the vaccine, such as neomycin or thimerosal.
- has a severe allergy (anaphylaxis) to eggs that causes hives, throat and/or tongue swelling, difficulty breathing or shock.
- is under six months of age.

Please Note: you will have to wait 48 hours to donate blood after getting an influenza vaccine.

Who should I talk to if I have any questions about the seasonal flu vaccine?

- Speak to your doctor or call Niagara Region Public Health at the number below to speak to a public health nurse.