

Influenza (Flu) Vaccine Fact Sheet

The influenza or “flu” vaccine helps protect children and adults from getting the flu and spreading it to others. The vaccine is changed every year depending on which flu strains are expected to cause the most illness. The vaccine helps protect against the 3 or 4 worst strains.

What is the flu?

- The flu is a virus that infects the nose, throat and lungs.
- The virus is spread very easily by coughing and sneezing, which releases it into the air where it can be breathed in by others. It can also be passed when an infected person shakes hands or touches surfaces like doorknobs or shared toys.
- If you get the flu you may experience coughing, fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, runny nose, sore throat, weakness and fatigue.
- In most people, the flu virus will not cause serious illness.
- However, the flu may cause pneumonia, and result in hospitalization, and even death, in the elderly, those with chronic health problems, or infants and young children.

Who should get the flu vaccine?

- It is recommended and available for free in Ontario for everyone 6 months of age and older.
- The flu vaccine is **especially** recommended for the following high risk groups:
 - anyone 65 years of age and over
 - all children between 6 months and 5 years of age
 - pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy
 - Indigenous peoples
 - anyone at high risk for flu-related complications including those with heart, kidney or lung disorders, neurologic or neurodevelopmental conditions, diabetes, cancer, immune problems or obesity
 - residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities
 - anyone who provides care to children under 5 years of age
 - anyone who may give the flu to those at high risk, including health care providers
 - anyone who provides essential community services, e.g. police

Who should not get the flu vaccine?

- Infants under 6 months of age
- Anyone with a high fever or moderate to severe illness should wait until they feel well.
- Anyone who has
 - had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of flu vaccine or a vaccine component, **with the exception of eggs**, since even individuals who have had severe reactions to eggs in the past may be vaccinated for flu.
 - previously developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome within the first 6 weeks after a flu shot.
 - had Oculo-Respiratory Syndrome (ORS) in the past, within 24 hrs of a flu shot, **with severe lower respiratory symptoms**, e.g. wheezing, tight chest or difficulty breathing.

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What are the common side effects of this vaccine?

- If you receive an injection, you may feel sore for a few days where the needle was given.
- Some people may have general muscle aches, fever and feel tired for a day or two.
- Tylenol® or ibuprofen may be taken as directed to reduce discomfort or fever afterwards.
- **Children under 19 years of age must not be given ASA, Aspirin® or salicylates.**

What else do I need to know?

- The influenza vaccine **cannot** give you the flu.
- Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to eggs in the past may still have the flu vaccine, including FluMist, the live nasal spray vaccine.
- Because the flu virus changes often, it is necessary to get a flu shot every year.
- The flu vaccine works best if you get it in the fall because it takes about 2 weeks before the vaccine is effective against the flu.
- You can still catch a different strain of flu that the vaccine does not protect against.
- To reduce the spread of the flu, sneeze or cough into a tissue or into your elbow or upper sleeve, and wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 15 seconds.

When should I seek medical help after immunization?

- If you or your child experiences any unusual side effects, such as a high fever, please seek medical attention and notify us.
- Go to Emergency at a hospital right away or call 911 if you or your child has any of the following symptoms after immunization:
 - swelling of the face and neck, red itchy eyes
 - problems breathing, wheezing or tightness in the chest
 - hives and itchy, reddened skin

Reference: Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza 2017/2018

Your Record of Protection

After you receive any immunization, make sure your health care provider updates your personal immunization record. Keep it in a safe place. Please inform Hastings Prince Edward Public Health of any immunizations not received from us.

Other questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Immunization Program at 613-966-5500
Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

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