



# INFLUENZA IMMUNIZATION

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Q: What is influenza (the flu)?**

**A: Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Influenza types A and B cause the majority of influenza illness in humans.**

**Q: What are the symptoms of influenza (the flu)?**

**A:** Symptoms include a sudden onset of high fever (38° to 40°C), headache, loss of appetite, severe muscle aches and pain, extreme fatigue and weakness, chills, dry cough, sweating, and sometimes sore throat, runny nose, nasal congestion and sneezing.

- Influenza symptoms can last 5 to 10 days.
- Influenza can lead to pneumonia or bronchitis, which may occur after a brief period of recovery.

**Q: Is influenza contagious?**

**A: The influenza virus is highly contagious, and can spread rapidly from person to person, by respiratory droplets carried in a cough or a sneeze, but also by touching contaminated surfaces.**

- The virus can survive up to 48 hours on surfaces like a telephone, computer keyboard, doorknob, kitchen countertop, coffeepot handle, or toys.

**Q: Why are seasonal influenza immunizations important?**

**A: The viruses that cause influenza are continually changing.**

Each year, the World Health Organization identifies four strains of the influenza virus that are predicted to be the most common and therefore will have the most impact on our health. Influenza vaccines are then developed based on these four viruses. Since these may change from year to year, you need annual influenza immunization to make sure your body forms antibodies against the new influenza viruses.

**Q: Where can I receive the vaccine?**

**A:** Immunization programs are available in all provinces and territories. Contact your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or public health office about vaccination programs available in your area.

**Q: When should I be immunized?**

**A: The recommended time for influenza immunization is the period from October to December.** However, influenza immunization may be beneficial when given any time from October to March, even after the start of influenza season.

**Q: How long does it take for the vaccine to work?**

**A:** It takes about 2 weeks for the vaccine to work.

**Q: How effective is influenza vaccination?**

**A:** How well the flu vaccine works (or its ability to prevent flu illness) can range widely from season to season and from person to person. The vaccine's effectiveness also can vary depending on who is being vaccinated. At least two factors play an important role in determining the likelihood that flu vaccine will protect a person from flu illness: 1) characteristics of the person being vaccinated (such as their age and health), and 2) the similarity or "match" between the flu viruses the flu vaccine is designed to protect against and the flu viruses spreading in the community. During years when the flu vaccine is not well matched to circulating viruses, the benefits of flu vaccination may vary. During years when there is a good match between the flu vaccine and circulating viruses, it's possible to achieve substantial benefits from vaccination in preventing severe flu illness.

**Q: How safe is the vaccine?**

**A:** The seasonal influenza vaccine is safe and can benefit individuals of all ages.

**Q: Who should be immunized against influenza?**

- A:**
- All Canadians 6 months of age and older
  - In particular, people at high risk of influenza infection and influenza-related complications, including:
    - all pregnant women
    - children 6 to 59 months of age
    - adults over the age of 65
    - Indigenous peoples
    - people considered morbidly obese
    - people living in nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities
    - children and adults with chronic health conditions such as :
      - cardiac or lung disorders, including asthma
      - diabetes
      - cancer
      - immune-compromising conditions
      - kidney disease
      - anemia or hemoglobinopathy
      - children and adolescents with chronic conditions treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid
      - neurologic or neurodevelopment conditions
  - health care providers who, through their activities, are capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk of influenza complications
  - people who provide essential community services

**Q: Who should NOT be immunized against influenza?**

- A:**
- people who have had an anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose, or to any of the vaccine components
  - onset of Guillain-Barré syndrome within six weeks of prior influenza vaccination
  - Note that egg allergy is NO longer a contraindication to influenza vaccination with either the live or the inactivated vaccine.

**Q: Can I get influenza from the vaccine?**

**A: No.** The influenza vaccine cannot cause influenza because it is made from disrupted components of the virus or inactivated viruses.

**Q: Are there side effects from the vaccine?**

**A: Influenza vaccine is very safe, but as with 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 flu vaccine was given. Some people may get a fever or muscle aches that start shortly after immunization and may last 1-2 days. Life-threatening allergic reactions are extremely rare. If they do occur, it is within a few minutes to a few hours following vaccination. Your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist will ask you to wait 20-30 minutes following your vaccination, to watch for possible reactions.

**Q: What should I do if I get influenza?**

**A:** Rest, drink plenty of fluids, and avoid contact with others by staying at home. Seek medical care if the symptoms are serious or you have difficulty breathing.

**Q: Can the influenza vaccine be given at the same time as other vaccines?**

**A:** It is possible to receive other vaccines at any time before or after the influenza vaccine. However, conditions may vary depending on the person receiving the vaccines. Talk with your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or local public health office about receiving more than one vaccine at the same time.

**Q: Can I get immunized against influenza if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?**

**A: Yes.** Influenza vaccine is considered safe and is recommended for all pregnant women at all stages of pregnancy and for breastfeeding mothers.

**Q: Are children at an increased risk of developing neurological disorders like autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) if they receive the influenza vaccine?**

**A: No.** The best available science has shown that there is no link between vaccines and autism or ADHD.

**Q: Why do some influenza vaccines contain thimerosal if other vaccines do not contain it?**

**A:** Thimerosal is added during the manufacturing process to keep multi-dose influenza vaccines sterile.

**Q: Where can I get more advice on influenza immunization?**

**A: Contact your local public health office, doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.**

You can also read more about influenza immunization on the following web sites:

**[immunize.ca](https://www.immunize.ca)**

Public Health Agency of Canada.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza.html>