



## What is Influenza?

Influenza (commonly known as “the flu”) is a serious, acute respiratory illness that is caused by a virus. People who get influenza may have a fever, chills, cough, runny eyes, stuffy nose, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, extreme weakness and fatigue. Children can also have earaches, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

People of any age can get influenza. Illness due to influenza usually lasts two to seven days; sometimes longer in the elderly and in people with chronic diseases. Most people who get influenza are ill for only a few days. However, the cough and fatigue can persist for several weeks, making the return to full activity difficult. Some people can become very ill, possibly developing complications and requiring hospitalization.

Influenza spreads by respiratory droplets from infected persons, through coughing or sneezing. It is also spread through direct contact with surfaces contaminated by the influenza virus, such as toys, eating utensils and unwashed hands.

## Who can get the seasonal influenza vaccine?

Anyone aged 6 months and older who lives, works or attends school in Ontario is eligible to receive the publicly funded inactivated trivalent (seasonal) influenza vaccine.

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

When there is a good match between the influenza strains in the vaccine and the influenza strains circulating in the community, the vaccine can prevent influenza illness in about 70% to 90% of healthy children and adults. Studies have shown that flu immunization decreases the incidence

It takes about two weeks after the immunization to develop protection against influenza; protection may last up to one year. People who receive the vaccine can still get influenza, but if they do, it is usually milder. However, the vaccine will not protect against colds and other respiratory illnesses that may be mistaken for influenza, but are not caused by the influenza virus.

## How many doses of the seasonal influenza vaccine are needed?

Because the influenza virus changes often, it is necessary to get an influenza immunization every year for protection from the new virus strains that may be circulating that year. All children less than 9 years of age who have not been previously immunized with influenza vaccine, but not trivalent inactivated influenza vaccine may require two doses of trivalent inactivated influenza vaccine.

## Who should not get the seasonal influenza vaccine?

The following persons should not get the seasonal inactivated influenza vaccine:

- Infants under six months of age (the current vaccine is not recommended for this age group).
- Anyone with a serious allergy (anaphylaxis) to eggs or egg products. A serious allergic reaction usually means that the person develops hives, swelling of the mouth and throat or has trouble breathing, a sudden drop in blood pressure, or shock after eating eggs or egg products.
- Anyone who has a severe allergy to any component of the vaccine. Your health care provider can tell you which components are in the specific vaccine. Some vaccines contain small quantities of antibiotics or preservatives.
- Anyone who had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of the influenza vaccine.
- It is not known whether the influenza vaccine causes an increased risk of recurrent Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) in persons who previously had GBS.

Anyone who has previously developed GBS within the first 8 weeks following an influenza immunization should avoid influenza immunization in the future.

## The seasonal influenza vaccine should be temporarily delayed in the following persons:

- Anyone with a moderate to severe acute illness with fever or just started on medication (e.g. antibiotics) should usually wait until the symptoms subside before being immunized.

- Immunization should generally be delayed in individuals with an evolving neurologic disorder, until the disease process has been stabilized.

## What are the risks from seasonal influenza vaccine?

The trivalent inactivated influenza vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing side effects, which can be either mild or, occasionally, severe. The risk of the vaccine causing serious harm is extremely small.

Most people who get the vaccine have either no side effects or mild side effects such as soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site. Life-threatening allergic reactions are very rare. If they do occur, it is within a few minutes to a few hours after receiving the vaccine. If this type of reaction occurs medical attention should be sought immediately.

## When should I seek medical attention after immunization with the seasonal influenza vaccine?

You should seek medical attention if you believe that you or someone in your care has had a reaction to a vaccine.

Any reaction to a vaccine should be reported to your health care provider who will report these occurrences to your local public health unit.