

Seasonal Influenza Vaccine

Public Health – Factsheet

Immunization is one of the most important accomplishments in public health that has, over the past 50 years, led to the elimination, containment and control of diseases that were once very common in Canada.¹ Vaccines help your immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

What is seasonal influenza?

Seasonal influenza (the flu) is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. Not everyone who gets the flu develops symptoms, but they can still spread it to others, especially if they cough or sneeze. The flu may seem similar to other respiratory viruses or the common cold. However, the signs and symptoms are usually more severe than the common cold. Sudden high fever, body aches, extreme tiredness and dry cough are more common with the flu than the common cold. Other common symptoms include headache, chills, loss of appetite and sore throat. Nausea and upset stomach may also occur, especially in young children. The flu can lead to more serious problems like pneumonia and bacterial infections, sometimes resulting in hospitalization.

The flu can spread easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing or sharing food or drinks. You can also get the flu by touching objects contaminated with flu virus and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose. For this reason, it's important to cover your nose and mouth with your forearm when you cough or sneeze, avoid touching your face, and wash your hands often with soap and water (or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable), especially after coughing and sneezing.

The flu season occurs each year. In Manitoba, it usually begins in the fall and lasts into the spring. For your protection, you should get immunized with the flu vaccine early in the fall before the flu starts to circulate.

What is the flu vaccine?

There are many different strains of flu virus that circulate each year. The flu vaccine does not protect against all of them. Every year, scientists monitor the global spread of flu and decide which flu strains will likely cause the most illness during the upcoming flu season. Those strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year. As a result, the vaccine can be different each year. For this reason, and because protection provided by the vaccine decreases over time, it's important to get the flu vaccine every year.

The flu vaccine cannot offer protection against other viral or bacterial infections including illnesses like the common cold, stomach flus, or other respiratory illnesses including COVID-19.

There are many different flu vaccines approved by Health Canada. Approved vaccines that are part of Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza Immunization Program are available free-of-charge to all Manitobans. The influenza vaccines offered in Manitoba are inactivated (not live) vaccines and are given by injection (needle) for people six months of age and older. Flu vaccines cannot cause the flu. There are two types of influenza vaccines approved for use and available in Manitoba: the standard-dose influenza vaccine and the high-dose influenza vaccine. There are two main differences between the two influenza vaccines:

1. The high-dose influenza vaccine contains four times the amount of influenza virus antigen per strain compared to the standard-dose influenza vaccine
2. The high-dose influenza vaccine protects against three strains of influenza predicted to cause the most illness whereas the standard dose influenza vaccine protects against four flu strains.

The live attenuated influenza vaccine supplied as a nasal spray will not be available as part of Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza Immunization Program. Its availability is unknown for future influenza seasons.

The standard-dose influenza vaccines offered to people aged six months and older provides protection against four flu strains that are most likely to cause illness this year.

The high-dose influenza vaccine is available for eligible individuals 65 years of age and older who are at higher risk of developing severe complications from influenza. This vaccine provides protection against three strains of flu. Please check www.manitoba.ca/flu for eligibility criteria.

Why should people get the flu vaccine?

Immunization against the flu has been shown to reduce the number of physician visits, hospitalizations and deaths, particularly among those who are at increased risk of serious illness from the flu.

Immunization is the best way to protect you and your child(ren) against the flu that can often be serious and sometimes fatal.

Vaccines help prepare your body to fight potential future exposure to the flu by getting your immune system ready.

¹ The Public Health Agency of Canada

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The vaccine helps protect you, your family and other people in your community.

Who should get the flu vaccine?

An annual flu vaccine is available free-of-charge to all Manitobans six months of age and older as part of Manitoba's routine immunization schedule.

The seasonal influenza vaccine takes about two weeks to start working. Therefore, it is important that you and your child(ren) get immunized early in the fall BEFORE the flu starts to circulate.

An annual flu vaccine is especially important for Manitobans at increased risk of serious illness from the flu, their caregivers and close contacts. This includes:

- people 65 years of age and older
- residents of personal care homes or long-term care facilities
- children six to 59 months of age
- individuals with the following chronic health conditions:
 - an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
 - cardiac or pulmonary disorders (ex: cystic fibrosis, asthma)
 - long-term acetylsalicylic acid (Aspirin®) therapy (for those between six months and 18 years of age only)
 - neurologic or neurodevelopmental conditions
 - diabetes and other metabolic diseases
 - renal disease
 - anemia or hemoglobinopathy
 - obesity (body mass index ≥ 40)
- pregnant women
- health care workers and first responders
- regular caregivers of children up to five years of age
- household contacts of anyone at increased risk of serious illness from the flu including those with infants under 6 months of age or expecting a newborn
- Indigenous peoples

Children younger than nine years of age who have NEVER received a flu vaccine need two doses, at least four weeks apart to create the optimal protection against the flu. After the first two doses are given, only one dose is required in following influenza seasons.

For specific details about any of the flu vaccine's ingredients, please visit the vaccine manufacturer's product monograph (links provided at Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza website: www.manitoba.ca/health/flu/resources.html) or speak with your health care provider.

Who should NOT get the flu vaccine?

Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of any flu vaccine or to any of the contents of any flu vaccine (excluding eggs), or who has developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within six weeks after receiving any flu vaccine, should not get vaccinated against the flu.

There is no need to delay immunization because of a cold or other mild illness. If you are experiencing symptoms notify your immunization provider before getting immunized.

Children under six months of age should not be given any influenza vaccine.

Adults younger than 65 years of age should not receive the high-dose influenza vaccine.

Possible side effects of the flu vaccine

It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get the flu. Health Canada approves vaccines based on a review of quality and safety.

The most common side effects of the standard-dose influenza vaccine offered to all Manitobans six months of age and older are soreness, redness or swelling where the vaccine was given.

The high-dose influenza vaccine may cause more soreness, redness and/or swelling where the vaccine was given (compared to the standard-dose influenza vaccine).

Other symptoms that may occur after administration of any of the flu vaccines available in Manitoba are fever, headache and tiredness. Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) can be given for fever or soreness.

Acetylsalicylic acid (e.g. Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.

Some people have experienced oculo-respiratory syndrome (ORS) that starts within 24 hours of receiving any of the flu vaccines. ORS is defined as redness in both eyes with (or without) swelling of the face plus one or more of the following: cough, wheeze, chest tightness, difficulty breathing and swallowing, hoarseness or sore throat. Talk to your health care provider if you or your child(ren) have previously experienced ORS after receiving a flu vaccine.

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It's important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department or health centre for immediate attention.**

Report any serious or unexpected side effects to a health care provider.

Your record of protection

Make sure your immunization provider updates your immunization record card or that of your child(ren), after you receive an immunization. Keep the card in a safe place!

All immunizations including the flu vaccine are recorded on an individual's immunization record in Manitoba's immunization registry. This registry:

- allows health care providers to find out which immunizations you or your child(ren) have had or need to have
- may be used to produce immunization records or notify you or your health care provider if a particular immunization has been missed
- allows Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living and public health officials to monitor how well vaccines work in preventing disease

The Personal Health Information Act protects your information and/or that of your child(ren). You can have your personal health information and/or that of your child(ren) hidden from view from health care providers. For additional information, please contact your local public health office or speak with a health care provider.

If you need information on the immunizations that you or your child(ren) have received, contact your health care provider. Contact your local public health office for a copy of your immunization records or those of your child(ren).

For a listing of public health offices, visit:
www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html.

For more information on the flu or the flu vaccines:

Talk to your health care provider.

Call Health Links–Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.

Or, visit:

Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza Program:

www.manitoba.ca/flu

Government of Canada:

healthycanadians.gc.ca/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/disease-maladie/flu-grippe/index-eng.php

Immunize Canada:

www.immunize.ca

Links to the product monographs for all the seasonal influenza vaccines used can be located at:

www.manitoba.ca/health/flu/resources.html