

Seasonal Influenza Vaccine (Flu Shot)

Communicable Disease Control – Factsheet

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention. Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

Why should I get the flu shot?

Getting the flu shot every year is the best way to protect yourself against seasonal influenza (the flu).

The flu can seem similar to a common cold, but the symptoms of the flu are usually more severe. Fever, body aches, extreme tiredness and a dry cough are more common with the flu than with a common cold. Also, the flu is more likely to lead to serious problems like pneumonia, bacterial infections and hospitalization.

When you are immunized, you also help protect others, because you are less likely to spread infection.

What is the flu?

The flu is an infection caused by a virus. It can spread easily from one person to another 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.

It's important to wash your hands regularly and practice good cough and sneeze etiquette (coughing or sneezing into your elbow, sleeve or using a tissue).

The flu season in Manitoba usually begins in the late fall and lasts into the spring.

What is the Flu Vaccine (Flu Shot)?

There are many different strains of flu virus. The vaccine cannot protect against all of them. Every year, scientists monitor the global spread of flu and decide which three flu strains will likely cause the most illness during flu season. Those three strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year, so each year the vaccine is different.

It is important to get the flu shot every year because the viruses change from year-to-year and the protection provided by the vaccine decreases over time.

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

This includes:

- Seniors aged 65 years or older
- Residents of personal care homes or long-term care facilities
- Children six months to five years of age
- Those with chronic illness such as:
 - an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
 - a condition that makes it difficult to breathe
 - children 6 months to adolescents 18 years of age on long term acetylsalicylic acid (i.e. aspirin) therapy.
 - other chronic medical conditions (ex. diabetes, mental disabilities)
- Pregnant women
- Health care workers and first responders
- Individuals of Aboriginal ancestry
- People who are severely overweight or obese
- Or as determined by your primary health care provider

Children under nine years of age who have never had a seasonal flu shot before will need two doses, given four weeks apart.

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Who should NOT get the flu vaccine?

Children under six months of age.

People with a high fever should not get immunized. But you can still get the flu shot if you have a mild illness like a cold.

Speak to a public health nurse or doctor if you have had a serious reaction to a previous dose of any vaccine, including Guillain Barré Syndrome (GBS), or if you have any severe allergies, including egg protein.

Possible side-effects of the flu vaccine.

Vaccines are known to be very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get the flu.

Common side-effects

It is common to have soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Some people may have fever, chills or fatigue. These are mild reactions and usually last one to two days. Acetaminophen (Tylenol® or Tempra®) can be given for fever or soreness.

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

Rare side-effects

It is 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 for immediate treatment.**

Other rare conditions

In past flu seasons, some people experienced one or more of the following symptoms associated with Oculorespiratory Syndrome (ORS): red eyes, shortness of breath, chest tightness, cough, sore throat, or swelling of the face. These symptoms usually appeared within 24 hours of getting the flu shot and were gone within two days.

Seasonal flu shots have been associated with Guillain Barré Syndrome (GBS), which is a form of paralysis that is usually temporary. It is a very rare reaction that occurs with approximately one out of every million flu vaccinations.

Report any serious or unexpected side-effects to a public health nurse or doctor.

For more information on the flu:

Talk to your doctor or public health nurse.

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

Or visit:

Manitoba Public Health website

www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/index.html

Public Health Agency of Canada

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/influenza/index-eng.php