

## SEASONAL INFLUENZA VACCINE (“Flu shot”)

### What is the seasonal influenza vaccine?

The seasonal **influenza** vaccine protects against viruses that cause influenza (flu). The vaccine does not protect against other viruses or bacteria that cause colds or stomach illness, such as stomach flu. Several influenza vaccines are approved for use in Canada each year by the Biologics and Genetic Therapies Directorate (BGTD). A new live vaccine was approved for use in Canada this year but this is not currently available through the publicly funded program.

The vaccine given by injection, is an inactivated (meaning, killed virus) vaccine. The components of the vaccine change from year to year based on worldwide tracking for changes in the virus and predictions about which strains will circulate each influenza season.

The vaccine for the 2011-12 influenza season contains three viruses: one influenza A/H1N1 virus, one influenza A/H3N2 virus, and one influenza B virus.

### What are the benefits of the vaccine?

Getting immunized each year is the best way to protect against influenza infection, a serious and sometimes fatal disease. When you and your family are immunized, you help protect others as well.

### How safe is the vaccine?

The vaccine is safe and, if a good match, can provide protection against influenza in 70 to 90 per cent of healthy children and adults.

### How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine is given as an injection into the upper arm or, in young infants and children, in the thigh. The live influenza vaccine available in Canada is given by nasal spray.

Children six months to eight years who have never had an influenza vaccine need to have two doses four weeks apart. This is very important to make sure the vaccine protects them. Otherwise, only one dose is required.

### Who should receive the vaccine?

Those eligible for publicly funded influenza vaccine this year include:

- Adults (including pregnant women) and children with the following chronic health conditions:
  - cardiac or pulmonary disorders (including bronchopulmonary dysplasia, cystic fibrosis and asthma);
  - diabetes mellitus and other metabolic diseases;
  - cancer, immunodeficiency, immunosuppression (due to underlying disease and/or therapy);
  - renal disease;
  - anemia or hemoglobinopathy;
  - conditions that compromise the management of respiratory secretions and are associated with an increased risk of aspiration; and
  - children and adolescents with conditions treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid.
- people of any age living in nursing homes and other chronic care facilities;
- people older than 65;
- healthy children six months to 18 years;
- all pregnant women; and
- people capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk:
  - household contacts (adults and children) of individuals at high risk of influenza-related complications (whether or not the individual at high risk has been immunized), as listed in the section above;
  - household contacts of infants younger than six months;
  - household contacts of children six to 59 months; and
  - members of a household expecting a newborn during the influenza season.

Although **not** eligible for publicly funded influenza vaccine, it is recommended that:

- health-care and other care providers in facilities and community settings and capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk of influenza complications; and
- those providing regular child care to children receive an annual influenza vaccination.

### Who should not receive the vaccine?

You should not receive the vaccine if you:

- had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of influenza vaccine, or any component of the vaccine or its container.
- developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within eight weeks of getting any influenza vaccine. GBS is a rare condition that can result in weakness and paralysis of the body's muscles.
- have a serious allergy to eggs.

Children younger than six months should not get the influenza vaccine because it is not licensed or known to be effective at this age.

### What are the possible reactions after receiving the vaccine?

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. In some people, symptoms can include mild fever, headache and aching muscles starting six to 12 hours after getting the vaccine and lasting about one to two days. The vaccine given by injection cannot give you "the flu" because it does not contain a live virus.

### What can be done for reactions to the vaccine?

- A cold compress at the injection site may reduce discomfort.
- For discomfort and fever, you may give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or Ibuprofen (Advil®) according to the manufacturer's directions.
- Aspirin (ASA) should **NOT** be given to children younger than 18 years due to its link to Reye's syndrome.

With any vaccine, there is an extremely rare possibility (less than one in a million people) of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. For this reason, it is important to remain in the clinic for 15 minutes after you or your child receives the influenza vaccine. Signs of this reaction may include rash, difficulty breathing or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. This reaction can be treated.

**Any unexpected or serious reaction to a vaccine should be reported to your health-care provider.**

### What else you need to know.

Please inform the immunization provider if you or your child has any health problems or allergies.

Your immunization provider will provide you with a record of immunization. Please keep this record in a safe place and bring it with you when you or your child is next due for immunization.

Individuals 16 years and older can give their own consent. Children younger than 16 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

If you or your child has any unusual reactions to the vaccine, or you have any questions or concerns, please contact your health-care provider.

### Further Information

The vaccine is available for children six to 59 months at your local [Public Health office](#). The vaccine is also available through health-care providers, [Victorian Order of Nurses \(VON\)](#) and some pharmacists. For further information about influenza contact the [Tele-Care](#) toll-free information line on 811.

Useful websites:

- Government of New-Brunswick <http://www.gnb.ca/health>
- Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion <http://www.immunize.cpha.ca>
- Public Health Agency of Canada <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>