



Influenza (Flu) Vaccine

What is the influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine protects against viruses that cause influenza, often called the flu. The vaccine does not protect against other viruses or bacteria that cause colds or stomach flu. Several different influenza vaccines are available in B.C. All of the vaccines are approved by Health Canada.

In B.C., the vaccine is usually available in October. For your best protection, you should get the influenza vaccine as soon as possible. To find a local flu clinic, visit www.health.gov.bc.ca/flu/.

Who should get the vaccine?

In B.C., the influenza vaccine or flu shot is provided free this year to the following groups of people.

People at high risk of serious illness from influenza:

- Children 6-23 months of age
- Pregnant women who will be in their third trimester during the influenza season
- Seniors 65 years and older
- Residents of any age living in residential care, assisted living or other group facilities
- Aboriginal people
- Children and teenagers required to take Aspirin® or ASA for long periods of time due to a medical condition.
- Children and adults with certain medical conditions, including:
 - Heart or lung disorders that require regular medical care, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or cystic fibrosis
 - Kidney disease, chronic liver disease such as hepatitis, diabetes, cancer, anemia, or weakened immune system
 - Those with health conditions causing difficulty breathing, swallowing, or a risk of choking on food or fluids, such as people with severe brain damage, spinal cord injury, seizures or neuromuscular disorders
 - Those who are very obese with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or more

People able to transmit or spread influenza to those at high risk of serious illness from influenza including:

- Household contacts of people at high risk
- Household contacts, caregivers and daycare staff of children under 24 months of age
- Doctors, nurses and other care providers who work in hospitals, residential care, assisted living or other group facilities
- People who live or work in confined settings, such as correctional facilities
- Those who provide care or service to people at high risk in potential outbreak settings such as cruise ships

Others:

- People who provide essential community services such as police officers, firefighters and ambulance attendants
- Farmers and other people who work with live poultry

To find out if you are eligible, talk to your health care provider or call HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1.

The influenza vaccine or flu shot is usually given as 1 dose. Children under 9 years of age who have never had an influenza vaccine need 2 doses, even if they received the pandemic H1N1 vaccine. The second dose is important to raise their level of protection.

Influenza vaccine is also available but not provided free for healthy people age 2 to 64 years in B.C. Anyone not eligible for a free influenza vaccine can purchase it at some public health units, doctors' offices, pharmacies and clinics. Some employers also provide free vaccine to employees.

A live influenza vaccine has also been approved for use in Canada for people age 2 to 59 years of age. This vaccine contains a weakened version of the influenza virus. It is given as a nasal spray. As a precaution, some people such as those with severe asthma or weakened immune systems should not get the live vaccine. The live vaccine is not available in the free public program in B.C. at this time.

Talk with your health care provider about which vaccine is best for you.

Benefits of the Influenza Vaccine

The vaccine is the best way to protect against influenza, a serious and sometimes fatal infection. When you get

vaccinated, you help protect others as well by reducing the spread of the influenza virus.

Possible Reactions after the Vaccine

Common reactions to the influenza vaccine or flu shot include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Other symptoms can include fever, headache, aching muscles and fatigue that may last 1 to 2 days. About 1 in 20 people may have cough, sore throat, hoarseness or red eyes, sometimes called ‘oculo-respiratory syndrome’.

The influenza vaccine or flu shot given by needle cannot give you influenza. The vaccine contains dead influenza viruses that cannot cause infection.

The live nasal flu spray contains weakened influenza viruses and may cause mild influenza symptoms, such as runny nose, nasal congestion, cough, sore throat and fever but these are much milder than those due to influenza infection.

Acetaminophen or Tylenol® can be given for fever or soreness. ASA or Aspirin® should NOT be given to anyone under 20 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number. This reaction can be treated, and it occurs in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine.

Report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), a form of paralysis, is usually temporary and can occur after some common infections. GBS may be associated with influenza vaccine in about 1 per million recipients.

Who should not get the influenza vaccine?

Speak with your health care provider if you:

- had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of influenza vaccine, or any component of the vaccine
- had severe oculo-respiratory syndrome after a previous flu shot
- developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 8 weeks of getting any influenza vaccine

- have a serious allergy to eggs. People with mild egg allergies can be safely vaccinated with the influenza vaccine.

Children less than 6 months of age should not get the flu shot and those under 2 years should not get the live vaccine because the vaccines are not designed for this age group.

What is influenza?

Influenza is an infection of the upper airway caused by the influenza virus. A person with influenza is at risk of other infections, including viral or bacterial pneumonia which is an infection of the lungs.

Influenza spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing, or having face-to-face contact. The virus can also spread when a person touches tiny droplets from a cough or sneeze and then touches their eyes, mouth or nose before washing their hands.

Mature Minor Consent

It is recommended that parents or guardians and their children discuss consent for immunization. Efforts are first made to seek parental/guardian or representative consent prior to immunization. However, children under the age of 19, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risk of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations.

For more information on immunizations visit Immunize BC at www.immunizebc.ca.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.



Immunize



BC Centre for Disease Control
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