

## Influenza (Flu) Season

Influenza, also called the flu, is an infection of the upper airway caused by an influenza virus. Every year there is a period of time when there are more outbreaks of the flu. This is called the flu season. The flu season generally occurs during the fall, winter and early spring.

Understanding the seasonal flu, including the health complications the flu can cause and who is at risk, can help prevent you and your family from becoming sick.

Getting sick with the flu can put you at risk of getting other infections. These include viral or bacterial pneumonia, which affects the lungs. The risk of complications can be life-threatening. People at higher risk of complications include

- senior 65 years and older
- very young children
- people who have lung or heart diseases, certain chronic health conditions or weakened immune systems

In Canada, thousands of people are hospitalized and may die from the flu and its complications during years with widespread or epidemic influenza activity.

### Common Questions about Influenza

Find answers to some of the [most common questions about influenza](#). Learn how it spreads, how long after exposure symptoms take to appear and what symptoms to look for. Find out what you can do to prevent influenza, from vaccination to handwashing.

### How can you prevent the flu?

The influenza vaccine is a safe and effective way to help prevent you and your family from getting sick. It can even save lives.

In addition to getting the flu vaccine, you can help stop the spread of the flu by:

- washing your hands regularly
- promptly disposing of used tissues in the waste basket or garbage
- coughing and sneezing into your shirt sleeve rather than your hands
- staying home when you are ill
- keeping your hands away from your face
- keeping common surface areas like doorknobs, light switches and keyboards, clean and disinfected
- eating healthy foods and staying physically active to keep your immune system strong

### What is in the flu vaccine?

The 2019-20 seasonal trivalent and quadrivalent vaccines contain

- A/Brisbane/02/2018 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus
- A/Kansas/14//2017 (H3N2)-like virus
- B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus (B/Victoria/2/87 lineage)
- B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (B/Yamagata/16/88 lineage) in quadrivalent vaccines only

The A/Brisbane and A/Kansas strains were not contained in the 2018/19 season vaccine.

There are several inactivated influenza vaccines available in B.C. The inactivated vaccines are made of killed influenza viruses and are given by injection.

**Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (the nasal spray vaccine):** Live attenuated influenza vaccine (also known as LAIV or Flumist®) will not be available in Canada this 2019/20 influenza (flu) season.

Publicly-funded influenza vaccines available in B.C. for 2019/20:

- Trivalent Inactivated Influenza Vaccines (TIIV )
  - Agriflu® (Seqirus Canada)
  - Fluviral® (GlaxoSmithKline)
- Quadrivalent Inactivated Influenza Vaccines (QIIV )
  - Fluzone® Quadrivalent (Sanofi Pasteur Limited)
  - Flulaval® Tetra (GlaxoSmithKline)

To learn more about this year’s seasonal influenza vaccine, visit [ImmunizeBC – Influenza](#) and [BCCDC: 2019/20 Seasonal Influenza Vaccines](#).

## Pharmacists Can Administer Vaccines in B.C.

Ask your community pharmacist if they can administer the vaccines to you

### Important Vaccine Information

#### Vaccine Eligibility

To learn who is eligible to receive the flu vaccines for free, visit [BCCDC: 2019/20 Seasonal Influenza Vaccines Eligibility](#) (PDF 87KB).

#### People with egg allergies

People with egg allergies can be safely immunized with the live and inactivated influenza vaccines.

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## Flu Information for Specific Groups

### Adults 65 Years of Age and Older

Fluzone High-Dose is a high dose trivalent inactivated influenza vaccine approved for use in Canada for adults 65 years of age and older. The high-dose vaccine is expected to be more effective than the standard vaccination. While the standard vaccine is free, Fluzone High-Dose is not publically funded in B.C. at this time. If interested, the vaccine is available at pharmacies throughout B.C. for an extra cost. For more information on Fluzone High-Dose Influenza Vaccine visit [BCCDC: Fluzone® High-Dose Influenza Question and Answer Document Updated - August 2019](#).

### For Health Care Workers and other Providers in Facilities and Community Settings

B.C. has an Influenza Prevention Policy to protect people at high risk from influenza. People at high risk include

- health care workers
- regular visitors
- emergency response workers
- people who have contact with residents of continuing care or long-term care facilities or residences
- people who provide home care for persons in high-risk groups
- students of related health care services

Health care workers, visitors, contractors and volunteers are required to be immunized against influenza or wear a mask when they are in patient care areas during the influenza season. This section provides information and resources about the

influenza prevention policy for health care workers. The links and following information are for your general information. Please speak to your supervisor if you are a health care worker about how this program applies to your facility or role.

NACI recommends that health care workers be offered any age –appropriate inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV), and not LAIVs.

### Influenza Policies and programs

- [Influenza Prevention Policy](#)
- [Influenza Control Program: Frequently Asked Questions – Influenza Vaccine](#)
- [Influenza Control Program: Frequently Asked Questions – Masking](#)
- [Influenza Policy for Visitors](#)
- [Influenza Policy for Contractors and Health Service Providers](#)
- [Influenza Policy for Managers](#)
- [Influenza Policy for Volunteers](#)

### People in direct contact with poultry infected with Avian Influenza H5N1 (Bird Flu)

Avian Influenza (H5N1), also known as the "bird flu", commonly causes sickness in birds. People are rarely infected. It is different from the seasonal flu and there is low risk of human to human transmission. NACI recommends immunization against seasonal influenza for people in direct contact with poultry infected with an avian influenza during culling operations. The Public Health Agency of Canada and BCCDC have more information about H5N1 for the general public. For more information see: [Public Health Agency of Canada: Avian Influenza \(H5N1\): Global Update](#)

### Featured Topics

#### Influenza (Flu)

To learn about the flu, how to prevent it, what the symptoms are, what the home treatments are and more, click on the link below.

- [Facts about Influenza \(the Flu\) \(HealthLinkBC File #12b\)](#)

#### Influenza (Flu) Vaccinations

Influenza vaccines are a safe and effective way to help people stay healthy, prevent illness and even save lives. To learn about the inactivated influenza vaccine, the live attenuated influenza vaccine, myths and facts about influenza immunization and the benefits of getting the vaccine, click on the links below.

- [Why Seniors Should Get the Inactivated Influenza \(Flu\) Vaccine \(HealthLinkBC File #12a\)](#)
- [Influenza \(Flu\) Immunization: Myths and Facts \(HealthLinkBC File #12c\)](#)
- [Inactivated Influenza \(Flu\) Vaccine \(HealthLinkBC File #12d\)](#)

#### Pneumococcal Vaccinations

Pneumococcal infection is caused by a germ or bacteria. It can cause serious and life-threatening infections. These infections include

- Meningitis, an infection of the lining that covers the brain
- Septicemia, an infection of the blood

To learn more about the vaccines that can help protect against pneumococcal infection, click on the links below.

- [Pneumococcal Conjugate \(PCV 13\) Vaccine \(HealthLinkBC File #62a\)](#)
- [Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine \(HealthLinkBC File #62b\)](#)

## Washing Your Hands

Hand washing is one of the best ways to keep yourself and others healthy. Regularly washing your hands can help stop the spread of germs that cause the flu. To learn more, click on the link below.

- [Hand Washing: Help Stop the Spread of Germs \(HealthLinkBC File #85\)](#)

## Useful Websites

### BC Centre for Disease Control

BCCDC provides health promotion and prevention services, and diagnostic and treatment services to reduce communicable and chronic disease, preventable injury and environmental health risks. BCCDC also provides analytical and policy support to government and health authorities.

- [Influenza](#)
- [Vaccines in BC](#)

### ImmunizeBC

ImmunizeBC works to reduce the number of infections by vaccine-preventable diseases in B.C. ImmunizeBC provides information on immunizations to individuals, families and health care providers. They also provide tools to make it easier for B.C. families to get immunized. For information on where you can locate flu clinics across the province or to learn more about the flu and the flu vaccine, click on the links below.

- [Influenza](#)
- [Frequently asked questions about influenza vaccines](#)
- [Influenza Clinic Locator](#)

### Government of Canada

Get answers to many questions about the seasonal flu, including causes, symptoms, risks, treatment and prevention.

- [Flu \(influenza\)](#)

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Information in the Influenza Health Feature is adapted from [Health Canada - National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#), accessed September 28, 2019, the [BCCDC: Vaccines in BC](#), accessed September 27, 2018 and [ImmunizeBC - Influenza](#), accessed September 28, 2019.