

Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for Residents of Long-term Care Facilities

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 the common cold, but the signs and symptoms of the flu are usually more severe. 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 and wash your hands often with soap and water (or hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable), especially after coughing and sneezing.

The flu season in Manitoba usually begins in the fall and lasts into the spring. Different strains of influenza virus can circulate throughout the season. For your protection, you should get immunized 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 flu season. Those strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year so each year, the vaccine is different. For this reason and because protection provided by the

vaccine decreases over time, it's important to get the flu vaccine every fall.

The flu vaccine cannot offer protection against other viruses or bacteria that cause the common cold or stomach flu.

There are two types of influenza vaccines approved for use and available in Manitoba for older adults. Please see the **Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Public Health Factsheet** for more information (link provided at the end of this factsheet).

Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living recommends that people aged 65 years and older who are living in a long-term care facility receive the high-dose influenza vaccine. The second influenza vaccine also available for older adults is known as the standard-dose influenza vaccine. Both vaccines are administered by injection (needle) and are inactivated. However, there are two main differences between the two influenza vaccines:

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

Why are residents of long-term care facilities offered the high-dose inactivated influenza vaccine?

Residents of long-term care facilities 65 years of age and older are very susceptible to complications from influenza and evidence suggests that they do not develop optimal protection with the standard-dose

¹ The Public Health Agency of Canada

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influenza vaccine. Although the high-dose influenza vaccine protects against only three of the flu strains, it is expected to provide superior protection overall because it contains four times the amount of flu virus antigen per strain, compared to the standard-dose influenza vaccine.

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 yourself against the flu, which 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.

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.

You should 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 six months of age or expecting a newborn
- Indigenous peoples

The high-dose influenza vaccine is available free-of-charge for Manitobans aged 65 years and older who live in a long-term care facility. Residents receiving respite care; those staying in an interim/transitional care bed; and any new residents to the facility who have yet to be immunized against influenza are also eligible for the high-dose influenza vaccine (provided they are at least 65 years of age).

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.

For specific details about the vaccine's ingredients, please visit the vaccine manufacturer's product monograph (available at www.manitoba.ca/health/flu/factsheets.html) or speak with your health care provider.

There is no need to delay immunization because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you are concerned, speak with a health care provider.

Possible side-effects of the high-dose 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.

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The high-dose influenza vaccine contains more influenza virus antigen than the standard-dose influenza vaccine. The high-dose influenza vaccine may therefore cause more soreness, redness and/or swelling where the vaccine was given. Other common side-effects are fever, headache and tiredness. Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) can be given for fever or soreness.

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, **seek immediate medical 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 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 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. You can have your personal health information 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 have received, contact your health care provider.

Contact your local public health office for a copy of your immunization records.

For a listing of public health offices, visit:

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

For more information on the flu or the flu vaccine:

Talk to your health care provider.

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

Or visit:

- **Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza Program:**
www.manitoba.ca/health/flu/
- **Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Public Health Factsheet:**
www.manitoba.ca/health/flu/factsheets.html
- **Government of Canada:**
www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza.html