

Seasonal Influenza Vaccine

Public Health – Fact Sheet

Immunization is one of the most important accomplishments in public health. Immunizations help eliminate and control the spread of infections and diseases. Vaccines help your immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause disease.

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 the flu to others, especially if they cough or sneeze. The flu may seem similar to other respiratory viruses or the common cold. However, the symptoms are usually more severe than the common cold. These symptoms could include sudden high fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, sore throat, and dry cough. Nausea and upset stomach may also occur, especially in young children. The flu can lead to more serious problems like pneumonia, which could lead to 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 the 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. Avoid touching your face and perform hand hygiene often. Hand hygiene can be done by washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after coughing and sneezing.

The flu season occurs each year. In Manitoba, it usually begins in the fall and lasts into the spring. The seasonal flu vaccine takes about two weeks to start fully working. Therefore, for your protection and the protection of those around you, it is important that you and your family get immunized with the flu vaccine before the flu starts circulating in Manitoba.

What is the flu vaccine?

Every year, scientists track the global spread of flu. They use this data to predict which flu strains will likely cause the most illness in the next flu season. These strains are then used to develop the flu vaccine for that year. As a result, the vaccine can be different each year. For this reason, and because protection provided by the vaccine decreases over time, it is important to get the flu vaccine every year.

There are many different flu vaccines approved by Health Canada. Approved vaccines that are part of Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza Immunization Program are available free of charge to all Manitobans.

The flu vaccine cannot offer protection against other viral or bacterial infections, including illnesses like the common cold, or other respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19.

Manitoba currently offers standard and enhanced flu vaccines. These vaccines are effective in protecting against the flu strains predicted to cause the most flu illness. The standard flu vaccines are offered to everyone aged six

months and older. The enhanced flu vaccines provide a stronger immune response to those at higher risk of severe illness and are recommended for individuals aged 65 and older.

For more information about enhanced flu vaccines and the eligibility criteria for individuals 65 years of age and older, please visit manitoba.ca/flu.

Why should people get the flu vaccine?

Getting the flu vaccine is the best way to protect you, your family, and other people in your community against the flu, which can often be serious. The flu vaccine has been shown to reduce doctor visits, hospitalizations, and deaths due to flu, especially for those at higher risk of severe flu illness.

Who should get the flu vaccine?

An annual flu vaccine is recommended and available free of charge to all Manitobans six months of age and older as part of Manitoba's routine immunization schedule.

It is especially important for the following Manitobans to get the flu vaccine due to increased risk of serious flu illness:

- people 65 years of age and older
- residents of personal care homes or long-term care facilities
- children six months to five years of age
- individuals with the following chronic health conditions:
 - an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
 - cardiac or pulmonary disorders (e.g. 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 individuals
- traditional healers, health care workers and first responders

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- those who provide services within closed or relatively closed settings to people at high risk (e.g., crew on a ship)
- people who provide essential community services
- 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
- people whose occupational and/or recreational activities increase their risk of exposure to avian influenza A(H5N1) viruses

Children younger than nine years of age, who have never received a flu vaccine, need two doses, at least four weeks apart to create the optimal protection against the flu. Only one dose is required each season thereafter.

For specific details about any of the flu vaccine's ingredients, please visit the vaccine manufacturer's product monograph (links provided at Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza website manitoba.ca/flu) or speak with your health care provider.

Who should NOT get the flu vaccine?

The following individuals should not receive the flu vaccine:

- children under six months of age
- anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of any flu vaccine
- anyone who has a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient of any flu vaccine (except eggs)
- anyone who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within six weeks after receiving any flu vaccine

Anyone with high fever should postpone immunization until recovered. The vaccine can still be given if the illness is mild, like a cold.

Possible side-effects of the flu vaccine

Health Canada approves vaccines based on an in-depth review of quality and safety.

The most common side-effects of the influenza vaccines offered to all Manitobans six months of age and older are soreness, redness 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. Acetylsalicylic acid (e.g., Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.

Some people have also experienced oculo-respiratory syndrome (ORS), which starts within 24 hours of receiving any of the flu vaccines. ORS is defined as redness in both eyes with (or without) swelling of the face, plus one or more of the following: cough, wheeze, chest tightness, difficulty

breathing and swallowing, hoarseness, or sore throat. Talk to your health-care provider if you or your child(ren) have previously experienced ORS after receiving a flu vaccine.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a very 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, it is important to seek immediate medical attention.

Please report any serious or unexpected side effects to a health care provider.

Your record of protection

All immunizations are recorded in a person's immunization record in Manitoba's Immunization Registry.

This registry enables:

- your health care provider to find out which immunizations you or your child(ren) have received,
- the production of immunization records or notification to you about overdue vaccines,
- public health officials to monitor how well vaccines work in preventing disease.

For information on how to obtain a copy of your immunization record, visit: manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/records.html.

The Personal Health Information Act protects your information and/or that of your child(ren). You can have your personal health information and/or that of your child(ren) hidden from view from health care providers. For more information, please refer to manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/surveillance/phims.html.

For more information on the flu or the flu vaccines:

- talk to your health care provider;
- call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257;
- visit **Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza Website:** manitoba.ca/flu