

# Influenza vaccine

**Protects against 3 to 4 strains of influenza disease.**

## What is influenza?

Influenza, or the flu, is a respiratory illness that spreads rapidly from person to person. Most people recover from the flu in about a week, but some people – including infants, children, the elderly and those with chronic health conditions – are at greater risk of serious complications such as pneumonia.

In Canada, flu season occurs in the late fall and winter months. The flu is easily spread at home, school, and work.

The symptoms associated with the flu range from unpleasant to very serious. For those who become infected with the flu, most will spend a week or more at home recovering.

Every year, approximately 23,000 Canadians become seriously ill from the flu and require hospitalization. Between 2,000 and 8,000 Canadians, mostly the elderly and high-risk patients, will die from the flu and its complications.

The most common symptoms are fever and cough. At least one of these symptoms will also be present: headache, chills, sore throat, muscle pain, joint pain, weakness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea may occur especially in young children.

## How is influenza spread?

The flu is spread directly from one person to another when infected people cough or sneeze. It can also be spread indirectly through contact with surfaces that are infected with the virus (e.g., toys, cell phones, and doorknobs). The flu can spread to others even before symptoms appear and before someone knows they are getting sick.

## How can you lower your risk of getting sick?

1. Get the flu shot annually from a participating pharmacy, your health care provider or Public Health. The flu shot offers protection from several of the common strains of the flu virus. It is very safe and is one of the most effective ways to avoid getting the flu. The flu vaccine cannot cause influenza because it does not contain any live virus.
2. Wash your hands often with soap and water. When hand washing isn't an option, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
3. Cough or sneeze into a tissue or shirt sleeve, not into your hands.
4. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth when possible.
5. Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces, like countertops, keyboards, and door knobs, especially after someone in the household has been sick.
6. Stay home if you are sick and protect other people from illness.

## Why get vaccinated?

Immunization is the best way to protect you and your family against serious diseases. This vaccine is most effective when given before exposure to the disease. How well the vaccine works each year depends on a person's immune system and the match between the circulating strains and the strains in the vaccine. The vaccine can provide some cross protection even when the match is not exact.

## Who is eligible to be vaccinated?

The vaccine is routinely offered to anyone over the age of 6 months. Most people, including pregnant women, need one shot each year. Children 6 months to 8 years of age who are getting the flu shot for the first time need two shots at least 4 weeks apart.

## Flu Vaccine for Seniors:

There are two different flu shots available for people 65 years and older – Fluad® (an adjuvanted standard dose) and the Fluzone® High-Dose. Both shots are effective.

The **adjuvanted standard dose** provides protection against 3 strains of the flu virus. The **high-dose** vaccine protects against 4 strains of the flu virus but in higher doses than the standard dose flu vaccine. Both vaccines have been shown to provide a stronger protection for individuals over 65 years when compared to the regular flu shot.

## Who should not get the flu shot?

- Anyone with a serious allergic reaction to a previous flu shot.
- Anyone who had Guillain-Barré syndrome within 6 weeks of a previous flu shot.
- Anyone with an allergy to any component of the vaccine.
- Children under 6 months of age are not eligible for the flu shot

## What to expect after vaccination?

Flu vaccine is safe and well tolerated. Side effects, if they occur, are usually mild and go away in a few days. Common side effects include redness, swelling and/or pain at the injection site.

Headache, fever, tiredness, dizziness, nausea and muscle aches may also occur, but are less common.

Severe allergic reactions (i.e. anaphylaxis), although rare, are a risk with the administration of any vaccine. It is recommended that you remain in a

clinic setting for 15 minutes following immunization as this is the most common timeframe when anaphylaxis will occur.

## For more information visit:

- Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health: [wdgpublichealth.ca](http://wdgpublichealth.ca)
- Ontario Ministry of Health: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/flu-facts>
- Immunize Canada: [www.immunize.ca](http://www.immunize.ca)