

INFLUENZA VACCINE INFORMATION SHEET – 2021/2022

Influenza facts

Influenza, commonly known as the “flu”, is a serious respiratory illness caused by a virus. It spreads through coughing and sneezing or through direct contact with surfaces contaminated by the virus. While some symptoms may be cold-like, the flu can be more serious, causing fever, chills, cough, sore throat, headache and body aches. Complications are more common in young children, the elderly and those who have chronic medical conditions.

The influenza vaccine

The vaccine contains only parts of flu virus and *cannot give you the flu*.

Each year the content of the vaccine is changed by the World Health Organization (WHO) to protect against the strains that are expected to circulate across the world. You need to receive the vaccine every year to be protected against the flu. The 2021/2022 quadrivalent influenza vaccines (QIV and QIV-HD) can protect against 4 different flu viruses: two influenza A viruses (H1N1 and H3N2) and two influenza B viruses. The 2021/2022 trivalent vaccines (TIV) protect against 3 different flu viruses: two influenza A viruses (H1N1 and H3N2) and one influenza B virus.

Vaccine effectiveness varies from year to year depending on different factors, including how well the vaccine matches the actual strains that are circulating in the community, and the age and health of the person being vaccinated. Protection is achieved two weeks after the immunization and may last six months or longer.

The flu vaccine is publicly funded for everyone 6 months of age and older who lives, works or attends school in Ontario. The flu vaccine is safe and recommended during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

What are the side effects of the influenza vaccine?

Most people have no reaction to the vaccine. The most common side effects for the injection vaccine can last 1-3 days and may include:

- Soreness, redness and swelling at the injection site;
- Tiredness/weakness;
- Low grade fever, headache and muscle aches.

Severe reactions including allergic (anaphylactic) reactions are very rare and typically occur within a few minutes to a few hours after receiving the vaccine. Oculorespiratory Syndrome (ORS) may occur in extremely rare cases.

What are the contraindications to getting the influenza vaccine?

You should not get the influenza vaccine if you are:

- Someone who has had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to any of the components of that specific flu vaccine with the exception of egg. Egg-allergic individuals may be vaccinated against influenza using any age-appropriate product, without prior influenza vaccine skin test. Individuals who have had an allergic reaction to thimerosal may receive an age-appropriate pre-filled syringed format of Fluzone® Quadrivalent, Afluria® Tetra, Flucelvax® Quad, Fluzone® High-Dose Quadrivalent or Flud® (unless contraindicated).
- Someone who has had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of the flu vaccine.
- Seriously ill, until you are feeling better.
- Someone who has developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of a previous influenza vaccination.
 - o The potential risk of GBS recurrence associated with influenza vaccination must be balanced against the risk of GBS associated with influenza infection itself and the benefits of influenza vaccination.

You may be referred to a physician if you have:

- Had a non-anaphylactic allergy or suspected hypersensitivity to a vaccine or its components.
- Developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of a previous influenza vaccination.
- A history of severe Oculo-Respiratory Syndrome involving difficulty breathing or wheezing following receipt of seasonal flu vaccine.