

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. For your protection, and the protection of those around you, you should get immunized with the flu vaccine early in the fall before the flu arrives 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, stomach flu, or other respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19.

Manitoba currently offers standard- and high-dose flu vaccines, effective in protecting against four flu strains predicted to cause the most flu illness. Both vaccines are given by injection (needle). Neither vaccine has the live flu virus in it.

While the standard-dose influenza vaccine is offered to everyone aged six months and older, the high-dose flu vaccine contains four times the amount of influenza virus proteins (or antigens) and it is recommended for everyone aged 65 and older to provide them with a stronger immune response.

For more information about the high-dose flu vaccine and for eligibility criteria, please visit manitoba.ca/flu.

Why should people get the flu vaccine?

Getting the flu vaccine can reduce the number of doctor visits, hospitalizations, and deaths during the flu season, particularly among those who are at increased risk of serious illness from the flu.

Immunization is the best way to protect you, your family, and other people in your community 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.

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.

The seasonal influenza vaccine takes about two weeks to start fully working. Therefore, it is important that you and your family get immunized early in the fall before the flu starts circulating.

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 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)

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- neurologic or neurodevelopmental conditions
- diabetes and other metabolic diseases
- renal disease
- anemia or hemoglobinopathy
- obesity (body mass index ≥ 40)
- pregnant individuals
- health-care workers and first responders
- 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
- 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

The high-dose flu vaccine is approved for use in those 65 years of age and older. People under the age of 65 should not be vaccinated with the high-dose flu vaccine. Instead, they should get the standard dose flu vaccine.

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 standard-dose influenza vaccine offered to all Manitobans six months of age and older are soreness, redness or swelling where the vaccine was given.

The high-dose flu vaccine contains more flu virus proteins (antigens) than the standard-dose flu vaccine, therefore it may 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. 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 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.

You can get your immunization record by submitting a request online via forms.gov.mb.ca/immunization-update-request. Your immunization record will be mailed to you.

You may also be able to get a copy by:

- contacting your local public health office; or
- checking if your local medical clinic or physician's office can provide it to you; or
- asking at a local nursing station or health centre.

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For a listing of public health offices please visit:

manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.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 or contact your local public health office to speak with a public health nurse.

For more information on the flu or the flu vaccines:

- talk to your health care provider; or
- call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257; or
- visit:

Manitoba’s Seasonal Influenza Website:

manitoba.ca/flu

Health Canada’s Influenza Website:

healthycanadians.gc.ca/diseases-conditions-maladies-affections/disease-maladie/flu-grippe/index-eng.php

Immunize Canada:

immunize.ca

Links to the product monographs for all the seasonal influenza vaccines used can be located at:

manitoba.ca/flu