



Health Promotion Services
Influenza- Fact Sheet (Vaxigrip, Intanza, Influvac and Fluviral)

Influenza (Flu) Fact Sheet

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

Please read before signing consent. This is yours to keep.

What Is Influenza (Flu)?

Influenza or the flu is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by a virus. Although colds and other viruses may cause similar symptoms, symptoms due to the influenza virus tend to be much more severe. People with influenza have high fever, chills, sweating, headache, sore throat, dry cough, severe muscle aches, extreme fatigue and weakness. The illness usually lasts for 5-10 days but a full recovery may take up to 6 weeks, making normal activity and work difficult. Each year in BC, hundreds of people die from the flu, or from complications of the flu such as pneumonia.

How Can I Protect Others And Myself?

Getting an influenza vaccination every year is the single most effective way of preventing the flu and reducing the severity of the flu should you get it. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and the Public Health Agency of Canada encourage influenza immunization for healthy persons even if they are not in one of the high risk groups. Studies have shown employees who get the flu immunization have a decreased absenteeism in the workplace compared to their non-immunized co-workers. The best time to be immunized is October and November.

Who Should Not Receive Influenza Immunization?

Those with serious allergies to eggs or egg products, chicken or to a previous dose of the flu vaccine; or to any component of the vaccine should not receive the immunization in this setting (you can discuss this matter further with your physician). Each brand of vaccine contains different ingredients. All flu vaccines contain egg proteins and formaldehyde. In addition: VAXIGRIP contains traces of neomycin (an antibiotic), thimerosal (a preservative), egg protein and Triton X-100 (a detergent used in biochemical laboratories). FLUVIRAL contains thimerosal (a preservative) and sodium deoxycholate (a detergent). INFLUVAC has the antibiotic gentamycin. There are other ingredients in the influenza vaccine not known to cause allergic reactions. Please let your nurse know if you have any specific allergy concerns.

People who developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome, GBS, (a serious, rare neurological disorder) within 8 weeks of receiving an influenza immunization are not allowed to get this vaccination today. Your chance of developing GBS as a result of a flu immunization is one in a million. People with an active neurologic disorder such as multiple sclerosis should delay immunization but should consider immunization when the disease process is stabilized.

Is Influenza Immunization Safe?

Yes. Serious allergic reactions are rare, approximately 1 in a million doses of vaccine. The dangers from getting the flu are much worse than from the flu shot. The influenza vaccine cannot give you the flu. The vaccine contains only inactivated and purified influenza viruses that cannot cause infection.



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What are the Side Effects?

Most people experience no side effects from the vaccine. The most common side effect is mild soreness at the injection site, lasting up to 2 days, but rarely interfering with normal activities. Mild fever, tiredness or muscle aches occasionally occur for 1 -2 days as your immune system works to build immunity. These effects are more common the first time you get immunized. Any more serious reactions are unusual and need to be reported to your physician.

Although allergic reactions can be serious they are rare. The nurse has medication to treat allergic reactions and this is the reason that you have to stay nearby for 15 minutes following any immunization.

Other points

- You need annual influenza immunization because each year the vaccine is customized for the flu season. Also, the immunity obtained from the vaccination may last only 4 – 6 months, depending upon your immune system.
- As with any vaccine, influenza vaccines may not protect 100% of individuals. Some people who get immunized may still get influenza, but it is usually a milder case.
- Protection from the flu is usually obtained 2 weeks after the immunization is received. It is possible to contract the flu during the time your body is building its immunity.

What Health Factors Should I Consider Before Getting the Influenza Immunization?

- In July 2007, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) announced that all pregnant women be included as recommended recipients of the influenza vaccine (unless other contraindications to the influenza vaccine exist). NACI further states that the influenza vaccine is considered safe for women at all stages of pregnancy and for breast feeding women.
- People who had Oculo-Respiratory Syndrome (ORS), (a reaction that includes sore throat, difficulty breathing, red eyes, cough, sore throat, hoarseness, swelling of the face) within 2-24 hours of the flu immunization), may safely get this influenza immunization. If you are unsure whether you had an ORS or an IgE mediated hypersensitivity immune response then you should see an allergist.

How Will I Receive the Influenza Vaccination?

The nurse will inject the vaccine in a muscle in the upper arm near the shoulder. Please dress accordingly.

The World Health Organization requires that each vaccination contain: an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)-like virus; an A/Perth/16/2009 (H3N2)-like virus; and a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus.