



INFLUENZA (Flu) Fact Sheet 2014

Influenza (Flu) Fact Sheet

Immunizations have 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 as soon as the vaccine is available.

NACI recommends that all pregnant women get the flu 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.

Who Should Not Receive Influenza Immunization?

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). FLUVIRAL contains thimerosal (a preservative). INFLUVAC has the antibiotic gentamicin. 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?

Common reactions to the influenza vaccine or flu shot include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Other symptoms can include fever, headache, aching muscles and fatigue that may last 1 to 2 days. About 1 in 20 people may have cough, sore throat, hoarseness or red eyes, sometimes called 'oculo-respiratory syndrome' ORS. Other reactions like itching all over are uncommon.

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. The immunity obtained from the vaccination will last up to 12 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.
- Most people who have ORS after a dose of influenza vaccine do not experience it again. Between 5-34% of people experience another episode but it is usually milder. A severe ORS response includes wheezing, chest tightness/discomfort, difficult breathing or severe throat constriction/difficulty swallowing. If a person had a severe ORS after a dose of flu vaccine and has not had a dose of flu vaccine since; then that person should see their family physician to distinguish between ORS and any anaphylaxis risk before getting their next flu vaccine.

How Will I Receive the Influenza Vaccination?

The nurse will inject the vaccine in the upper arm near the shoulder. Please wear a short sleeve top. The World Health Organization requires that each vaccination in 2014 contain: an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1) like virus; an A/Texas/50/2012 (H3N2)-like virus; a B/Massachusetts/2/2012-like virus.

Questions?

If you have questions before or after your clinic then email or phone our nurse manager. Her contact information is below.