

## Influenza (Flu) Vaccines (Agriflu®, Fluviral®, and Vaxigrip®)

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### Vaccine Benefits

Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent influenza. Each year, there is a new vaccine to protect against the influenza (flu) virus strains that are expected in the coming influenza season. Even if the strains have not changed, getting the flu shot every year is necessary to maximize protection.

Flu shots are about 60% effective in preventing influenza illness. Vaccines are less effective in the elderly, but will still prevent or lessen the severity of influenza. The flu shots at TPH clinics are given by injection.

The expert advisory committee on vaccines in Canada (National Advisory Committee on Immunization) states that a vaccine spray in the nose (FluMist®) works better in healthy children two to five years old and is preferred. FluMist® costs about \$30 per dose and can be given by your healthcare provider. The vaccine in the arm that is offered at this clinic is free, safe and works well to prevent influenza infection in children.

Children from the age of six months to less than nine years old who are getting the seasonal influenza vaccine for the first time should be given two doses of vaccine at least four weeks apart.

Influenza vaccination is the best way to protect against getting influenza. Other steps you can take to prevent influenza infection include clean your hands frequently and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unclean hands; cover your cough and sneeze; and stay home when you are sick.

### People who should get the vaccine

Everyone who is six months of age or older should get the flu shot, unless there are medical reasons that prevent them from getting it. The following groups are considered high priority for getting the flu shot:

- **those at high risk of influenza-related complications** including
  - people with underlying health conditions, including obesity
  - residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities
  - people 65 years of age and older
  - children six to 59 months of age
  - pregnant women
  - Aboriginal peoples
- **those capable of spreading influenza to people at high-risk of complications** such as
  - health care providers
  - household members
  - people providing care to children less than 59 months of age
- **those who provide essential community services**

## People who should not get the vaccine

- Infants under six months of age
- Persons who had an anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose of influenza vaccine **OR** to any vaccine components (e.g., neomycin, kanamycin, thimerosal), with the exception of egg\*
- Persons who had Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within six weeks of influenza vaccination
- Most people who have had Oculorespiratory syndrome (ORS) can safely receive the vaccine but should speak with their doctor first
- Postpone vaccination in persons with serious acute illness until their symptoms have resolved (there is no need to delay vaccination because of minor illness, such as a cold, with or without fever).

\*People with egg allergies may get the flu shot in regular vaccination clinics.

## Vaccine Side Effects and Risks

Flu shots are safe and well-tolerated. Soreness at the injection site may occur and can last up to two days. Children can get a fever after vaccination. You cannot get influenza from influenza vaccine.

Severe side effects and allergic reactions are rare:

- Allergic reactions are very rare and may include rash, trouble breathing, and swelling of the throat and face
- Oculorespiratory syndrome causing red eyes, swelling of the face, coughing, wheezing and difficulty breathing rarely occurs
- Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) is a very uncommon disease that causes muscle paralysis and has been associated with certain infectious diseases. In very rare instances (about one in one million doses of vaccine), the flu shot has been associated with GBS.

Consult your health care provider if you have a severe reaction to the flu shot.

## Disease Information

Influenza is a respiratory infection caused by influenza A and B viruses. In Canada influenza infection generally occurs in the late fall and winter months. Influenza is easily spread by direct contact or droplets expelled during breathing, talking, sneezing or coughing.

Symptoms include sudden onset of headache, chills, cough, fever, loss of appetite, muscle aches, fatigue, runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes and throat irritation. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea may also occur, especially in children.

Most people will recover within a week to ten days, but some people are at greater risk of complications, such as worsening of underlying medical conditions, pneumonia, and sometimes death. Each year in Canada, approximately 12,200 people are hospitalized and 3,500 die due to influenza and its complications.