



# Influenza Vaccines for Adults

(Agriflu®, Fluviral®, Fluzone® and Influvac®)

## Vaccine Benefits

Getting the flu vaccine every year is the best way to prevent influenza. Each year, there is a new vaccine to protect against the flu virus strains that are expected in the coming influenza season. Even if the strains have not changed, getting vaccinated every year is needed 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.

Until recently, influenza vaccines were made to protect against three different influenza strains (two influenza As, one influenza B). However, there are two different strains of influenza B viruses that can circulate in a given flu season. This year, Canada has approved a four-strain (quadrivalent) vaccine that includes a second influenza B-strain to provide broader protection. Quadrivalent vaccines are available by injection (flu shot) or by a vaccine spray in the nose. According to the Canadian National Advisory Committee on Immunization, both the three-strain and four-strain influenza vaccines are acceptable choices for most adults 18 years and older.

Currently in Ontario, the three-strain flu vaccine is free for adults 18 years and older. The four-strain flu vaccines are only free for children six months to 17 years of age. For adults, if preferred, quadrivalent vaccines can be given by your health care provider and cost about \$24 to \$30.

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:

- **People 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
- **People who may spread influenza to others at high-risk of complications such as**
  - health care providers
  - household members of those at high-risk of influenza-related complications
  - people providing regular care to children less than 6 years of age
- **People who provide essential community services**

➤ over

### **People who should not get the vaccine.**

- Babies under six months of age
- Persons who had a severe allergic reaction (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
- ORS causing both eyes to be red and one or more respiratory symptoms such as cough, wheeze, chest tightness, difficulty breathing, swallowing, hoarseness or sore throat
- 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 high fever, chills, sore throat, cough and muscle aches. Other common symptoms include headache, loss of appetite, fatigue and runny nose. 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.

*Adapted with permission from Toronto Public Health (November 20, 2015).*