



FluMist®

What is Influenza?

Influenza (commonly known as “the flu”) is a potentially serious respiratory infection caused by influenza A and B viruses. In Canada, influenza generally occurs each year in the late fall and winter months. People who get influenza usually feel quite unwell. Symptoms can include: sudden onset of fever, chills, cough, runny eyes, stuffy nose, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, extreme weakness and fatigue. *Note: the elderly may not have a fever. Children can also have earaches, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.*

People of any age can get influenza and most people will recover within 7-10 days. Some individuals, especially those 65 years of age and older, and adults or children with chronic conditions, are at greater risk for more severe complications, such as pneumonia. Symptoms such as cough and fatigue can persist for several weeks, making the return to full activity difficult.

Influenza spreads by respiratory droplets from infected persons, through coughing or sneezing. It is also spread through direct contact with surfaces contaminated by the influenza virus, such as toys, eating utensils, and unwashed hands.

What is FluMist®?

FluMist® is a nasal spray influenza vaccine, given by spraying 0.1ml into each nostril. FluMist® is a live vaccine, which means the influenza virus has been weakened, so it will not cause influenza, but will stimulate the person to develop immunity to the virus. It is licensed in Canada for ages 2-59, but it is only publicly funded for 2-17 year olds in Ontario.

If local supplies of the vaccines are limited, administration of FluMist® may be restricted to 2-5 year olds. FluMist® is the most effective influenza vaccine for this age group.

How many doses of FluMist® are needed?

Because the circulating influenza viruses change often, and the vaccine only reliably provides protection for one influenza season, it is necessary to get immunized every year. Adults and children, who have received seasonal influenza vaccine before, only need one dose each season. Children less than 9 years of age receiving seasonal influenza vaccine for the first time are recommended to have two doses at least 4 weeks apart. This is the same for any influenza vaccine whether given by needle, or by nasal spray.

How well does the vaccine work?

When there is a good match between the influenza strains in the vaccine and those circulating in the community, the vaccine can prevent influenza illness in about 60% of healthy children and adults. Studies have shown that influenza immunization decreases the frequency of physician visits, hospitalization and death in high risk persons.

It takes about two weeks after receiving influenza vaccine for your body to develop protection against influenza; protection may last up to one year. People who receive the vaccine can still get influenza, but if they do, it is usually milder. The vaccine will not protect against colds or other respiratory illnesses that may be mistaken for influenza.

Who should not get FluMist®?

- Children under 24 months of age, due to increased wheezing.
- Pregnant women
- Adults 60 years of age or older
- Anyone who had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of the influenza vaccine.
- Anyone who developed Guillain Barré Syndrome (GBS), a rare neurological condition, within 6 weeks of a previous influenza immunization.
- Anyone who has had an anaphylactic reaction to eggs, egg proteins, gentamicin, gelatin or arginine. Those allergic to eggs can receive the influenza vaccine given by needle.
- Children under 18 years of age who are taking aspirin or medicines containing aspirin.
- Individuals with severe asthma, defined as currently on oral or high dose inhaled glucocorticosteroids, or active wheezing.
- Anyone taking a medication active against influenza
- Anyone with a compromised immune system due to underlying disease/therapy.
- Individuals with a very congested nose.

Can the vaccine cause influenza?

While the FluMist® vaccine is a live vaccine, the virus has been weakened and should not cause influenza illness in healthy people. People with compromised immune systems are not recommended to receive this vaccine.

Studies on FluMist® have shown that people can “shed” the vaccine virus, but it is generally at lower levels than what is needed to actually pass the virus onto someone else. Those who are immunized with FluMist® are generally advised to avoid close contact with people who have severely compromised immune systems for at least two weeks after being immunized, if possible.

What are the potential risks and side effects from FluMist®?

The most common side effects are nasal congestion and runny nose.

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (or GBS)

GBS is a rare disorder where a person's own immune system damages nerve cells, causing muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis. It most commonly occurs following gastrointestinal, respiratory, or other infections, including influenza infection. On very rare occasions, an individual may develop GBS in days or weeks following an immunization. However, just because the person develops GBS does not automatically mean that the vaccine caused GBS.

Is there an alternative to FluMist®?

An age appropriate injectable influenza vaccine is an alternative for those unable, or unwilling, to receive FluMist®. The influenza vaccine provided by the needle in the arm is free, safe and still works very well to prevent influenza infection in children.

When should I seek medical attention?

The risk of FluMist® causing serious harm is extremely small. Call your health care provider, go to the nearest hospital, or call 911, if any of the following occur within three days of getting the vaccine:

- High fever (over 40C or 104F)
- Hives
- Swelling of the face or mouth
- Trouble breathing
- Crying for several hours
- Very pale colour and serious drowsiness
- Convulsions or seizures
- Any other unexpected effects

If medical attention was required, please notify the health unit, after your child has received the appropriate medical treatment. We investigate and report any confirmed Adverse Event Following Immunization.

What else do I need to know?

If you are looking for more information about influenza or any of the influenza vaccines, please contact Your Health Connection 705-721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520, or visit our website at www.simcoemuskokahealth.org