

Ministry of Health

# Health Care Provider Qs & As: Information for the 2020/2021 Influenza Season

*This Qs & As sheet is intended for informational purposes only. It is not intended to provide medical or legal advice.*

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## A. Universal Influenza Immunization Program

### 1. What is the Ontario Universal Influenza Immunization Program (UIIP)?

Ontario's Universal Influenza Immunization Program (UIIP) offers influenza vaccine free of charge each year for individuals six months of age and older who live, work or go to school in Ontario.

### 2. Where and how can Ontarians access publicly funded influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine is available to the public through primary care providers, public health units, pharmacies (for those 5 years of age and older), and in various other settings such as long-term care homes, workplaces, hospitals and community health centres. Vaccine product availability may vary by location. During the influenza season, Ontarians can contact their local public health unit if they require assistance locating influenza vaccine.

A list of local public health units is available at:

[www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx).

Individuals may be required to provide proof that they live, work or attend school in Ontario to receive the publicly funded flu vaccine. Many different identification (ID) documents are accepted to prove eligibility (e.g., health card, registered mail, pay stub, student card).

### 3. How important is the UIIP and vaccination against influenza during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The flu shot is the best defence against getting and spreading the influenza virus, helping to save lives and reduce the strain on our health care system.

Every year, individuals with influenza and influenza-related complications increase the burden on the healthcare system in the fall and winter months. During the COVID-19 pandemic and potential COVID-19 circulation this fall, it will be essential to prevent morbidity and mortality related to influenza to reduce the burden on the health care system to ensure there is capacity to respond to COVID-19 activity.

## B. Influenza Burden

### 4. How many people typically become infected with influenza every year?

In the 2019/2020 influenza season, there were over 55,300 laboratory-confirmed cases of influenza reported nationally to FluWatch, Canada's surveillance system that monitors the spread of influenza and influenza-like illness. It is important to note that there are many more people infected with influenza each year in Canada; most people with influenza do not seek health care and/or do not have a specimen taken and are thus not included in the case counts for those with laboratory-confirmed influenza.

## 5. How many people are hospitalized or die of influenza every year?

Influenza and pneumonia are ranked among the top 10 leading causes of death among the Canadian population. According to Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), it is estimated that approximately 12,200 influenza related hospitalizations and 3,500 deaths related to influenza occur on average in Canada each year. The actual numbers can vary from year-to-year depending on the severity of the influenza season. For more information visit [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/canadian-immunization-guide-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2020-2021.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/vaccines-immunization/canadian-immunization-guide-statement-seasonal-influenza-vaccine-2020-2021.html).

## 6. Who should receive the influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine is recommended for people six months of age and over without contraindications. Although infants less than six months of age are at high risk of complications from influenza, influenza vaccines are not authorized for use in infants less than six months of age because the vaccine does not work well in this age group.

To reduce the risk of severe illness that could potentially arise from co-infection with COVID-19 and influenza, individuals who are at high risk of severe COVID-19 related illness or those capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk of severe and critical illness related to COVID-19 are particularly recommended to receive the influenza vaccine this fall.

Per NACI, individuals in the following four groups are particularly recommended to receive the influenza vaccine:

1. Individuals at high risk of influenza-related complications or who are more likely to require hospitalization:
  - All pregnant women
  - People who are residents of nursing homes or other chronic care facilities
  - People  $\geq 65$  years of age
  - All children 6-59 months of age
  - Indigenous peoples
  - Adults or children 6 months of age and over with the following chronic health conditions:
    - Cardiac or pulmonary disorders
    - Diabetes mellitus or other metabolic disease
    - Cancer
    - Conditions or medication which compromise the immune system
    - Renal disease
    - Anemia or hemoglobinopathy
    - Neurologic or neurodevelopmental conditions
    - Morbid obesity (body mass index of  $\geq 40$ )
    - Children and adolescents (6 months to 18 years) undergoing treatment with acetylsalicylic acid for long periods

2. Individuals capable of transmitting influenza to those listed in group 1 and/or to infants under 6 months of age:
  - Health care workers and other care providers in facilities and community settings
  - Household contacts (adults and children) of individuals at high risk of influenza related complications
  - Persons who provide care to children ≤59 months of age
  - Members of a household expecting a newborn during the influenza season
  - Those who provide services within a closed or relatively closed setting to persons at high risk of influenza related complications (e.g. crew on a ship)
3. People who provide essential community services
4. Poultry industry workers

### C. 2020/2021 Universal Influenza Immunization Program

#### 7. Which influenza vaccines are publicly funded in Ontario as part of the 2020/2021 UIIP?

	Quadrivalent Inactivated Vaccine			High-Dose Trivalent Inactivated Vaccine
<b>UIIP Abbreviation</b>	QIV			High-dose TIV
<b>NACI Abbreviation</b>	IIV4-SD		IIV4-cc	IIV3-HD
<b>Vaccine product</b>	FluLaval Tetra	Fluzone® Quadrivalent	Flucelvax® Quad	Fluzone® High-Dose
<b>Manufacturer</b>	GSK	Sanofi Pasteur	Seqirus	Sanofi Pasteur
<b>Vaccine Type</b>	Egg-based	Egg-based	Cell-culture based	Egg-based
<b>Micrograms of hemagglutinin</b>	15 µg	15 µg	15 µg	60 µg
<b>Dosage</b>	0.5 mL	0.5 mL	0.5 mL	0.5 mL
<b>Format</b>	Multidose vial	1. Multidose vial 2. Prefilled syringe	Prefilled syringe	Prefilled syringe
<b>Route</b>	Intramuscular injection	Intramuscular injection	Intramuscular injection	Intramuscular Injection
<b>Age indication</b>	≥6 months	≥6 months	≥9 years	≥65 years

	Quadrivalent Inactivated Vaccine			High-Dose Trivalent Inactivated Vaccine
Vaccine product	FluLaval Tetra	Fluzone® Quadrivalent	Flucelvax® Quad	Fluzone® High-Dose
Most common allergens <sup>^</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Egg protein*</li> <li>• Thimerosal</li> </ul>	1. Multidose vial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Egg protein*</li> <li>• Thimerosal</li> </ul> 2. Prefilled syringe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Egg protein*</li> </ul>	Does NOT contain egg protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Egg protein*</li> </ul>

<sup>^</sup>Any component in a vaccine may be a potential allergen. This table identifies most common allergens.

\*NACI indicates that egg allergy is not a contraindication for influenza vaccination and that egg-allergic individuals may be vaccinated against influenza using the full dose of any age-appropriate product.

**Important notes:**

- Fluzone® Quadrivalent and Fluzone® High-Dose are different products. Fluzone® High-Dose is only authorized for those 65 years of age and over. Please use caution when administering Fluzone® products to ensure that the right vaccine is being administered to the right person.
- Fluzone® High-Dose will be available through primary care providers (e.g. physicians and nurse practitioners), participating pharmacies and retirement homes, long-term care homes and hospitals.
- Flucelvax® Quad is only authorized for individuals 9 years of age and over and should not be used in younger children.
- FluMist® will not be publicly funded for the 2020/2021 influenza season.
- Publicly funded influenza vaccines must be administered by a regulated health professional who is authorized under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* to administer vaccines, or by a trained individual under a delegation made in accordance with the requirements set by the regulatory College of the regulated health professional.
- Publicly funded vaccine may be administered to individuals who meet the eligibility criteria for the UIIP (i.e. individuals who are 6 months of age and older who live, work or study in Ontario) and without contraindications to the vaccine.
- Trained pharmacists may only administer publicly funded influenza vaccine to individuals 5 years of age and older.

**8. Which influenza vaccines are different age groups eligible to receive through the Ontario Universal Influenza Immunization Program?**

Age Group	QIV			High-Dose TIV
	FluLaval Tetra	Fluzone® Quadrivalent	Flucelvax® Quad	Fluzone® High-Dose
6 months ≤8 years	✓	✓		
9 years ≤64 years	✓	✓	✓	
≥65 years*	✓	✓	✓	✓

**9. Which influenza vaccine should individuals ≥65 years of age receive?**

Please refer to the following:

- Question 4 in the Health Care Provider Qs & As: Information for individuals ≥65 years of age fact sheet and;
- Public Health Ontario's *Influenza Vaccines for the 2020-2021 Influenza* available at: [www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/influenza](http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/influenza).

**10. What is the Flucelvax® Quad cell culture-based influenza vaccines?**

Flucelvax® Quad is a mammalian cell culture-based QIV that is authorized for use in Canada in individuals 9 years of age and older.

- 'Cell culture-based' refers to how the influenza vaccine is made. The influenza viruses that are used in this vaccine are grown in cultured cells of mammalian origin instead of in hens' eggs. All other influenza vaccines authorized for use in Canada are produced by growing influenza viruses in eggs.
- Cell culture-based vaccines have been authorized for use in other countries for a number of years.

Both egg-based and cell culture-based QIVs provide protection against four strains of influenza and are available in the UIIP for 2020/2021. Any of the available products can be used in the age group for which they are indicated.

**11. What are the recommended needle gauge and lengths for intramuscular injections for different age groups?**

	Infants, toddlers and children	Adolescents and adults
Recommended needle gauge	22-25	22-25
Recommended needle length	7/8 - 1 inch	1 - 1½ inch

**12. What are the post-puncture shelf life and product dimensions for the vaccine products offered in the 2020/2021 UIIP?**

	FluLaval Tetra	Fluzone® Quadrivalent	Flucelvax® Quad	Fluzone® High-Dose
<b>Post-puncture shelf life</b>	28 days*	Multi-dose vial 28 days*	Not applicable	Not Applicable
		Prefilled syringe Not applicable		
<b>Package dimension (cm)</b>	2.7 x 2.7 x 6.9	Multi-dose vial 3 x 2.9 x 6.2	15.4 x 13.02 x 2.38	10 x 9 x 2.2
		Prefilled syringe 10.4 x 8.9 x 3.8		

\* Return vials with remaining doses to PHU or OGPMS (for Toronto clients) as wastage.

**13. Which strains of influenza are recommended to be included in the vaccine products offered in the 2020/2021 UIIP?**

For the northern hemisphere’s 2020/2021 season, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended the following strains be included:

Influenza Strains	Egg-based QIVs (FluLaval Tetra, Fluzone® Quadrivalent)	Egg-based TIVs (Fluzone® High-Dose)	Cell-culture based QIVs (Flucelvax® Quad)
A/Guangdong-Maonan/SWL1536/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus	✓	✓	
A/Hong Kong/2671/2019 (H3N2)-like virus	✓	✓	
A/Hawaii/70/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus			✓
A/Hong Kong/45/2019 (H3N2)-like virus			✓
B/Washington/02/2019-like virus (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus	✓	✓	✓
B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus	✓		✓

**14. Why are different viruses recommended for egg- and cell culture-based vaccines?**

In some instances, the same influenza virus strain is not optimal for both egg- and cell culture-based production systems. In such cases different influenza virus strains with similar properties are selected as the prototypes to facilitate vaccine production in each system.

## D. Influenza Vaccine

### **15. How well does the influenza vaccine protect against influenza?**

Influenza viruses change frequently (this is called antigenic drift) – they can change from one season to the next and they can even change within the course of one influenza season. The influenza vaccine is made to protect against the influenza viruses that surveillance and research indicate will likely be most common during the upcoming influenza season as recommended by WHO.

Protection offered from the influenza vaccine varies from year-to-year depending on how well the strains included in the vaccine match the circulating strains. How well the influenza vaccine works also depends on other factors such as the age and health status of the person. Influenza immunization has been shown to reduce the number of physician visits, hospitalizations and deaths.

Although a less than ideal match between the vaccine strain(s) and circulating strain(s) may result in reduced vaccine effectiveness, even mismatched vaccines can generally provide some protection against circulating influenza viruses. Influenza vaccines also protect against multiple strains, therefore if one strain in the vaccine is not a good match to a circulating strain, there are other flu strains in the vaccine which may still be a good match to circulating virus strains.

It generally takes about two weeks following immunization to develop protection against influenza. As protection wanes over time and influenza strains change frequently, it is important to be immunized each year (each influenza season). The vaccine will not protect against colds, other respiratory illnesses or COVID-19 that may be mistaken for influenza.

### **16. Do any of the publicly funded influenza vaccines offer protection against COVID-19?**

The influenza vaccine will not protect against coronaviruses and COVID-19, but will help prevent the flu.

### **17. Will the influenza vaccine increase risk of illness with COVID-19?**

Expert groups and evidence indicate that getting the influenza vaccine will not increase your risk of COVID-19 illness.



**18. Do individuals need to receive the influenza vaccine every year?**

Expert advisory groups recommend that the influenza vaccine be administered annually because influenza viruses change often and immunity wanes between influenza seasons.

**19. Can the influenza vaccine be given at the same time as other vaccines?**

The influenza vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines or at any time before or after other vaccines. If given at the same time as other vaccines given by injection, separate limbs should be used if possible. Alternatively, the injections may be administered into the same muscle separated by at least 2.5 cm (1"). Different immunization equipment (needle and syringe) must be used for each vaccine given by injection.

**20. Are the influenza vaccines safe?**

Influenza vaccines authorized for use in Canada are safe and well tolerated. As with other vaccines, they must be authorized for use by the Canadian regulator, Health Canada, following review of a product's safety and how well it works (e.g. clinical trial and other evidence).

Once a vaccine is authorized for use in Canada it is closely monitored for vaccine safety through provincial surveillance in Ontario and by Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

**21. What are the risks from the influenza vaccine?**

The influenza vaccine, like any medicine, can cause adverse events, which in most cases are mild, lasting only a few days. Life-threatening allergic (anaphylactic) reactions are very rare. If they do occur, it is typically within a few minutes to a few hours after receiving the vaccine. If this type of reaction occurs, medical attention should be sought immediately. For details on common adverse events from the influenza vaccines, as well as serious events requiring medical attention, please refer to the age specific Health Care Provider Qs & As sheets.

Other rare events associated with the influenza vaccine include the following:

**Guillain-Barré Syndrome (or GBS)**

GBS is a rare disease that causes muscle paralysis and has been associated with certain infectious diseases (e.g., *Campylobacter*, a bacteria that causes diarrhea). Some studies have found a possible small association of injectable flu vaccine with GBS. Overall, these studies estimated the risk for GBS after vaccination as fewer than 1 or 2 cases of GBS per one million people vaccinated. Other studies have not found any association. In comparison to the very small risk of GBS, the risk of illness and death associated with influenza is much greater. GBS also, rarely,

occurs after flu illness. Even though GBS following flu illness is rare, GBS is more common following flu illness than following flu vaccination. Individuals who have developed GBS within 6 weeks of an influenza vaccination, should generally avoid subsequent influenza vaccinations, however, this should be weighed against the risks of not being vaccinated.

### **Oculorespiratory Syndrome (ORS)**

In Canada, during the 2000/2001 influenza season, ORS was reported after administration of the influenza vaccine in some individuals. Symptoms include redness in both eyes that are not itchy, plus one or more respiratory symptoms occurring within 24 hours of influenza immunization, with or without swelling of the face. Since the 2000/2001 influenza season, there have been far fewer cases of ORS reported per year.

Individuals who experienced ORS symptoms in the past may be safely re-immunized with influenza vaccine except for those who have experienced ORS with severe lower respiratory symptoms (wheeze, chest tightness, difficulty breathing) within 24 hours of influenza immunization. These individuals should seek expert medical advice before being immunized again with influenza vaccine.

Health care providers (e.g., physicians, nurses and pharmacists) are required by law (i.e., *Health Protection and Promotion Act*, section 38) to report adverse events following immunization (AEFI). Reports should be made using the Ontario AEFI Reporting Form (available at: [www.publichealthontario.ca/vaccinesafety](http://www.publichealthontario.ca/vaccinesafety)) and sent to the local public health unit.

A list of public health units is available at:  
[www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx).

**For additional information on influenza or the vaccine, please visit the following websites or call your local public health unit:**

- a) Universal Influenza Immunization Program: [www.ontario.ca/influenza](http://www.ontario.ca/influenza)
- b) Public Health Agency of Canada - National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/naci-ccni/#rec](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/naci-ccni/#rec)
- c) NACI Guidance for influenza vaccine delivery in the presence of COVID-19: [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/guidance-influenza-vaccine-delivery-covid-19.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/guidance-influenza-vaccine-delivery-covid-19.html)

- d) Interim guidance on continuity of immunization programs during the COVID-19 pandemic: [www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/interim-guidance-immunization-programs-during-covid-19-pandemic.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/national-advisory-committee-on-immunization-naci/interim-guidance-immunization-programs-during-covid-19-pandemic.html)
- e) Public Health Ontario: [www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/influenza](http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/diseases-and-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-diseases/influenza)
- f) Immunize Canada: [www.immunize.ca](http://www.immunize.ca)
- g) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - Seasonal Influenza: [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu)
- h) List of public health unit locations: [www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/system/services/phu/locations.aspx)

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