



Flu Season - The Flu Vaccine

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Getting a yearly influenza vaccine is a safe and effective way to avoid getting the flu. This article gives you basic information about the flu and about the flu vaccine.

What is the Flu?

- Influenza (nicknamed the “flu”), is an infection caused by the influenza virus. This is not the same virus as the common cold, and it is also not the same as viruses that cause the “stomach flu”. Influenza infects the nose, throat and lungs. It can cause fever, muscle aches, fatigue, cough, and runny and stuffy nose. Children may also have nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. Symptoms usually start about 2 days after being exposed to the virus. Fever and other symptoms usually last 7 to 10 days, but cough and weakness may last 1 or 2 weeks longer.
 - Influenza can make you more susceptible to getting pneumonia (an infection in the lungs), or can lead to other health risks. Those most at risk for complications are pregnant women, seniors 65 years and older, very young children, and people who have lung or heart diseases, certain chronic health problems, or weakened immune systems. Hospitalized patients and seniors in residential care are also more vulnerable to influenza. Each year there are between 2,000 and 8,000 deaths in Canada from influenza and its complications.
 - The three main ways to avoid getting the flu are to wash your hands often, to avoid contact with those who have the flu, and to get a flu shot.
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Where do I get the flu vaccine?

- You can get the flu shot at your local pharmacy or at your family doctor's office; you can also get vaccinated at walk-in clinics and public health clinics.
- Visit <http://www.immunizebc.ca/clinics/flu>, or call the BC Healthline at 8-1-1 to find a pharmacy near you that offers the flu shot. Note that pharmacists give vaccines to ages 5 and up. Children under 5 can be vaccinated at doctor's offices or public health clinics.
- There is also a nasal spray flu vaccine that is provided as an option for those ages 2 to 17. Supply is sometimes limited so it is a good idea to call ahead to see if it is available.

Am I eligible for a free vaccine?

- Flu shots are available to anyone who wishes to get one. If you are not eligible for a free one, you can still purchase one at your pharmacy.
 - You are eligible for a free flu shot if you fall into any of these categories:
 - People 65 years and older and their caregivers/household contacts;
 - Residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities;
 - Children and adults with chronic health conditions, including obesity, and their household contacts;
 - Children and adolescents (six months to 18 years) with conditions treated for long periods of time with acetylsalicylic acid, and their household contacts;
 - Healthy children age six months to under five years of age
 - Household contacts and caregivers of infants age zero to under five years;
 - Aboriginal peoples (on and off reserve);
 - All pregnant women and their household contacts;
 - Health care and other care providers in facilities and community settings who are capable of transmitting influenza to those at high risk of influenza complications;
 - People who provide essential services including first responders and correction officers;
 - People who work with live poultry;
 - People planning to visit loved ones in a health care facility or who will take family members to outpatient appointments are also eligible for a free flu shot.
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What are the possible side effects of getting a flu shot?

- 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 or 2 days. More serious reactions, such as anaphylaxis, are very rare. Vaccine providers are trained and prepared to watch out for and respond to all potential reactions.
- The influenza vaccine given by needle cannot give you influenza. The vaccines available in the health-care worker program contain only part of the influenza viruses and cannot cause infection.

To learn more about the flu shot, follow these links: [Influenza Vaccine Myths and Facts](#), [BC Newsroom – Get Vaccinated](#), [Flu Vaccine FAQs](#). You can also contact your local pharmacist, your doctor's office, or call BCHealthlink by dialing 8-1-1.