

Fact Sheet:

Influenza Vaccine - Inactivated

1. What is influenza?

Influenza is a contagious viral infection which causes fever, headache, muscle and joint pain, sore throat, chest congestion and cough. About 10-20% of Canadians are infected with influenza each year. Infection due to influenza virus can lead to health complications, the most common being pneumonia. Approximately 3,500 deaths occur annually in Canada due to influenza related illness and complications.

2. Who is recommended to receive the influenza vaccine?

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommends influenza vaccine for **all** Canadians over 6 months of age, with particular emphasis on the following groups:

- people at high risk of influenza related complications or hospitalization including those with chronic illnesses, morbid obesity, cancer, immune suppression due to disease or therapy, those treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid (ASA), residents of nursing homes or facilities, those aged 65 years and older, children aged 6-59 months, pregnant women and aboriginal peoples.
- those at risk of transmitting influenza to others including;
 - 1) health care workers and others providing care or services to high risk persons,
 - 2) household contacts of those at high risk of influenza related complications (e.g. infants less than 6 months, pregnant women, immune suppressed or chronically ill patients as above).
- people in direct contact during culling operations with poultry that is infected with avian influenza.
- others who provide essential community services.

The protection against influenza strains in the vaccine is obtained within 2-3 weeks after immunization and lasts for 6-12 months.

3. What is the inactivated influenza vaccine?

Inactivated influenza vaccine is a vaccine approved for use in persons aged 6 months and older. The vaccine contains several inactivated strains of influenza virus which are recommended each year for seasonal protection. Health care providers are advised of the products recommended by NACI for specific ages and populations.

4. What are the contents of inactivated influenza vaccine?

Inactivated influenza vaccines contain parts of inactivated (dead) virus proteins called antigens. Traces of non-medicinal ingredients are present to keep the product sterile and stable. Some preparations of inactivated vaccine contain an adjuvant to help it work more effectively. The packaging does not contain latex. The full list of contents of the vaccine is available in the product monograph which can be obtained from your health care provider.

5. What are the possible reactions to the inactivated influenza vaccine?

The most common side effects of the influenza vaccine are redness, pain and temperature at the site of injection. Some people may experience headache, muscle aches, and fatigue. These reactions are generally mild and last 1-2 days. If your symptoms persist for an extended period of time you should contact your health care provider for assistance.

It is not necessary to give acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol® or Tempra®) with every immunization. However, if one experiences discomfort or fever, acetaminophen can relieve these symptoms.

In very rare instances a serious allergic reaction can occur requiring medical intervention from a health care provider. Your health care provider is able to quickly respond to this allergic reaction by administering adrenaline.

This type of reaction occurs within 15 minutes of receiving the vaccine. **You will be asked to remain in the waiting room for 15 minutes after receiving your vaccination.**

6. What are the situations in which inactivated influenza vaccine should not be given?

The vaccine should not be given to those:

- with history of anaphylaxis to a previous dose or to any ingredient contained in the vaccine (except egg);
- less than 6 months of age;
- with history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of a previous influenza immunization;
- with serious acute febrile illness at the time of the appointment; they may return when their symptoms have resolved.

7. What are the risks if influenza vaccine is not received?

The risk of contracting influenza illness and of spreading it to others is increased when influenza vaccine is not received. Transmission of influenza illness contributes to increased hospitalization and prolonged illness, particularly in those who are more vulnerable.