

Enhanced Seasonal Influenza (Flu) Vaccine for People Aged 65 and Older

Public Health – Fact Sheet

Immunization is one of the most important accomplishments in public health. Immunizations help eliminate and control the spread of infections and diseases. Vaccines help your immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause disease.

What is seasonal influenza (the flu)?

Seasonal influenza (the flu) is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. Not everyone who gets the flu develops symptoms, but they can still spread the flu to others. The flu may seem like other respiratory viruses or the common cold. However, the symptoms are usually more severe than the common cold. These symptoms could include sudden high fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, sore throat, and dry cough. Nausea and upset stomach may also occur, especially in young children.

The flu can be a serious and sometimes fatal condition in older adults. This is because an older adult's immune system gradually declines in its ability to fight off infections. Severe flu can cause prolonged hospital stays and deaths due to pneumonia or heart attacks. Individuals recovering from severe flu are less able to do normal activities such as grocery shopping and walking.

The flu can spread easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing, or sharing food or drinks. You can also get the flu by touching objects contaminated with the flu virus and then touching your mouth, eyes, or nose. For this reason, it is important to cover your nose and mouth with your forearm when you cough or sneeze. Avoid touching your face and perform hand hygiene often. Hand hygiene can be done by washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after coughing and sneezing.

The flu season occurs each year. In Manitoba, it usually begins in the fall and lasts into the spring. The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to start fully working. Therefore, for your protection and the protection of those around you, it is important that you and your family get immunized with the flu vaccine before the flu starts circulating in Manitoba.

What is the flu vaccine?

Every year, scientists track the global spread of flu. They use this data to predict which flu strains will likely cause the most illness in the next flu season. These strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year. As a result, the vaccine can be different each year. For this reason, and because protection provided by the vaccine decreases over time, it is important to get the flu vaccine every year.

There are many different flu vaccines approved by Health Canada. Approved vaccines that are part of Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza Immunization Program are available

free of charge to all Manitobans. Manitoba currently offers standard dose and enhanced flu vaccines. All flu vaccines are effective in protecting against the flu strains predicted to cause the most flu illness.

The flu vaccine cannot offer protection against other viral or bacterial infections including illnesses like the common cold, or other respiratory illnesses including COVID-19.

Why should people aged 65 years and older get an enhanced flu vaccine and how is it different from the standard flu vaccine?

Older adults may not have as strong an immune response to the standard flu vaccine compared to younger adults. This is why older adults should receive an enhanced flu vaccine.

Enhanced flu vaccines create a stronger immune response against flu by adding an ingredient (adjuvant) or increasing the amount of flu proteins (antigens). They are safe and effective against severe flu illness and its complications. For more information about enhanced flu vaccines and the eligibility criteria for individuals 65 years of age and older, please visit manitoba.ca/flu.

Who should NOT get an enhanced flu vaccine?

The following individuals should not receive the enhanced flu vaccine:

- anyone under 65 years of age; those under the age of 65 should receive the standard dose flu vaccine
- anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of any flu vaccine
- anyone who has a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient of any flu vaccine (except eggs)
- anyone who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within six weeks after receiving any flu vaccine

Anyone with high fever should postpone immunization until recovered. The vaccine can still be given if the illness is mild, like a cold.

For specific details about any of the flu vaccine's ingredients, please visit the vaccine manufacturer's product monograph (links available at Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza website manitoba.ca/flu) or speak with your health care provider.

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What are the possible side effects of the flu vaccine?

Health Canada approves vaccines based on an in-depth review of quality and safety.

The most common side effects of the influenza vaccines are soreness, redness or swelling where the vaccine was given. These side effects may be stronger after receiving enhanced flu vaccines, however, these symptoms are mild and temporary. Other common side effects are fever, headache, and tiredness. Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) can be taken for fever or soreness.

Some people have also experienced oculo-respiratory syndrome (ORS) which starts within 24 hours of receiving any of the flu vaccines. ORS is defined as redness in both eyes with (or without) swelling of the face plus one or more of the following: cough, wheeze, chest tightness, difficulty breathing and swallowing, hoarseness, or sore throat. Talk to your health care provider if you have previously experienced ORS after receiving a flu vaccine.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a very rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue, or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, it is important to seek immediate medical attention.

Report any serious or unexpected side effects to a health care provider.

Your record of protection

All immunizations are recorded in a person's immunization record in Manitoba's Immunization Registry.

This registry enables:

- your health care provider to find out which immunizations you or your child(ren) have received,
- the production of immunization records or notification to you about overdue vaccines,
- public health officials to monitor how well vaccines work in preventing disease.

For information on how to obtain a copy of your immunization record, visit: manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/records.html.

The Personal Health Information Act protects your information and/or that of your child(ren). You can have your personal health information and/or that of your child(ren) hidden from view from health care providers. For more information, please refer to manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/surveillance/phims.html.

For more information on the flu or flu vaccines:

- talk to your health care provider;
- call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257;
- visit **Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza Website:** manitoba.ca/flu