

## Influenza Vaccine (FLU)

**Immunization protects you from disease. Get protected, get immunized.**

- **Vaccines make your immune system stronger by building antibodies, which help prevent diseases.**
- **Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get this disease.**

Who should have influenza vaccine?

Everyone (6 months and older) should have influenza vaccine. It is free if you live, work or go to school in Alberta.

Everyone is at risk of influenza, and anyone can get very sick and develop complications. However, the risk is highest if you:

- have some types of health problems (e.g., heart/lung conditions, diabetes, weak immune system, morbid obesity/very overweight)
- live in a care facility (e.g., nursing home)
- are 65 years or older
- are a child under 5 years old
- are pregnant
- are Indigenous

It is important for the above people and their close contacts (e.g., family, caregivers, healthcare providers) to get immunized every season.

Are there different types of influenza vaccines?

There are many types of influenza vaccine. Every year, Alberta Health reviews information to make the best decision on which vaccines will be offered for free.

Your health care provider will talk to you about which vaccine is best for you.

How many doses of this vaccine are needed?

If your child is less than 9 years of age, and getting influenza vaccine for the first time, your child will need 2 doses of vaccine this season. They are given at least 4 weeks apart.

For everyone else, one dose is needed each influenza season (late fall through winter).

How well does influenza vaccine work?

The vaccine lowers your risk of getting influenza by about half. The influenza vaccine can keep you from getting influenza, make influenza less severe if you do get it, and keeps you from spreading influenza to your family and others.

How well the vaccine works changes from one influenza season to another. A new vaccine is made every year to protect against the 3 or 4 viruses that are most likely to cause sickness that season. Even when the vaccine does not exactly match the viruses going around, it can still give some protection.

Protection starts about 2 weeks after you get the vaccine.

Where can I get the vaccine?

Influenza immunization is given at Alberta Health Services (AHS) Influenza Immunization Clinics, from late October to the end of March. To find local clinic schedules, visit [www.ahs.ca/influenza](http://www.ahs.ca/influenza) or call Health Link at 811.

Many family doctors and pharmacists offer free influenza vaccine. Call ahead before visiting to find out if your doctor or pharmacist is offering the vaccine.

If you want a type of influenza vaccine that is not free, you may be able to buy it at a pharmacy. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is right for you. Check with your health insurance provider as some plans may cover the cost.

## Are there side effects from influenza vaccine?

Reactions to the vaccine are usually mild and go away in a few days. They may include:

- redness, swelling, and discomfort where the needle was given
- feeling tired or irritable
- headache or body aches
- fever or chills
- poor appetite, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, or diarrhea

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after immunization because people can have a rare but serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis). If anaphylaxis happens, you will be given medicine to treat the symptoms.

Unusual reactions can happen. Call Health Link at 811 to report any unusual reactions.

### How can I manage side effects?

- To help with discomfort and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area.
- If you need fever or pain medicine, check with your pharmacist or doctor. Do not give aspirin to anyone younger than 19 years old because it can cause serious health problems.

- Some people with health problems (e.g., weak immune system) must call their doctor whenever they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor—even if you think the fever was due to immunization.

## Is there anyone who cannot have influenza vaccine?

You may not be able to have the vaccine if you:

- have an allergy to parts of the vaccine—always tell your healthcare provider about allergies.
- had a severe or unusual reaction after this vaccine (or a similar one)—always tell your healthcare provider if you have had reactions.

You can be immunized if you have an allergy to eggs or a mild illness (e.g., cold), even if you have a fever.

## For More Information



Call Health Link at **811**



Go to [immunizealberta.ca](http://immunizealberta.ca)



Go to [myhealth.alberta.ca](http://myhealth.alberta.ca)



Go to [albertahealthservices.ca/influenza/influenza.aspx](http://albertahealthservices.ca/influenza/influenza.aspx)

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# Quick Facts: Influenza

## What it is

- an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs that is caused by a virus
- symptoms start suddenly and may include: fever, sore throat, runny nose, cough, headache, muscle aches, loss of appetite, and feeling tired. Vomiting and diarrhea can happen but is more common in young children
- pneumonia is the most common complication of influenza
- influenza can make other health problems worse
- even healthy, young people can get very sick and die from influenza
- each year, more than 12,000 people in Canada are admitted to hospital and 3,500 die from influenza

## How it spreads

- easily spread when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or even talks
- the virus can be breathed in
- people can be exposed to it when they touch something that carries the virus (e.g., hands, objects) and then touch their eyes or nose
- influenza can spread before symptoms start

## How to prevent spreading influenza

- get immunized
- wash your hands with warm water and soap or use an alcohol-based hand rub (hand sanitizer) often
- cover your cough or sneeze into your arm or a tissue, not your hand
- stay home when you are sick