

FLU SHOT FACTS (FLUVIRAL, INFLUVAC & VAXIGRIP)

What Is The Flu?

- Flu is a common respiratory illness that affects millions of Canadians every year.
- It is caused by a virus, which enters the lungs but soon affects the whole body.

What Are The Signs Of Flu?

- People with the flu have high fever, chills, sweating, headache, sore throat, dry cough, severe muscle aches, extreme tiredness and weakness.
- Flu usually lasts for 5-10 days but a full recovery may take up to 6 weeks, making normal activity difficult.

Why Is Influenza So Serious?

- Influenza can kill, and it can spread easily through coughing and sneezing and by unwashed hands. In most people, influenza is contagious for up to 2 days before the onset of symptoms and for about 5 days after they begin. That means influenza has 7 days to spread to anyone with whom the infected person comes into contact.
- Some people who get influenza develop serious complications. These include pneumonia, brain swelling, heart failure and worsened breathing conditions, sometimes leading to hospitalization and even death. Flu reduces a person's resistance to other infections and antibiotics have no effect on viral illnesses like the flu.

How Can I Protect Others And Myself?

Getting an influenza vaccination (or flu shot) every year in the fall can help prevent the infection or reduce the severity of the illness.

Who Should Receive the Flu Shot?

The Public Health Agency of Canada recommends influenza immunization as important especially for:

- Adults and children with chronic heart and lung disease
- People 65 years of age and older
- Anyone living in a nursing home or chronic care facility
- People with chronic conditions such as diabetes, anemia, cancer, immune suppression or HIV
- Children and adolescents on long-term acetylsalicylic acid (ASA) therapy
- Health care workers, caregivers and household contacts in close contact with the above at-risk groups
- People at high risk of influenza complications who are traveling
- All infants and children 6 months to 23 months

Who Should Not Receive A Flu Shot?

Those persons who should not receive the flu shot include:

1. Infants less than six months of age should not receive any flu shot;
2. Children less than 18 years of age should not receive INFLUVAC vaccine.
3. Those with severe allergies to eggs or egg products; to a **previous dose of the flu vaccine**; or to **any component** of the flu vaccine should not receive the flu shot. Each brand of flu shot vaccine contains different ingredients. All three flu vaccines contain **eggs or egg products, and formaldehyde**. In addition:
 - ❖ **VAXIGRIP** contains Neomycin (an antibiotic) and thimerosal (a preservative in contact lens solution) and chicken protein.
 - ❖ **FLUVIRAL** contains thimerosal (a preservative in contact lens solution).
 - ❖ **INFLUVAC** contains gentamycin (an antibiotic) and chicken proteinThere are also a number of other ingredients in flu shots not known to cause allergic reactions, please let your nurse know if you have any specific allergy concerns.

What Do I Need To Know About the Injectable Flu Vaccine?

- ∇ The influenza vaccine contains non-infectious “killed” viruses, which cannot cause influenza.
- ∇ FLUVIRAL and VAXIGRIP Flu Vaccines can be given to people 6 months of age and older.
- ∇ INFLUVAC Flu Vaccine can be given to people 18 years of age and older.
- ∇ Children under 9 years of age, who are getting the flu shot (FLUVIRAL and VAXIGRIP) for the first time, require 2 doses of vaccine to get the best protection possible from the flu shot; everyone else needs just 1 dose. You must arrange for the second flu shot in four weeks with a health care professional.
- ∇ A common complaint after getting the flu shot is pain and swelling at the site and fever, tiredness and muscle aches. These are not serious problems and usually last only 1 or 2 days. **Do not give** children **aspirin** to treat fevers due to a risk of **Reye’s syndrome**.
- ∇ Allergic reactions are rare and are probably the result of a reaction to one of the vaccine components, most likely the residual egg protein.
- ∇ Yearly vaccination is necessary because each year different types of flu virus can arise. The flu shot is changed each year to protect against the types of flu causing widespread or serious flu in the particular year.
- ∇ As with any vaccine, influenza vaccines may not protect 100% of individuals. Some people who get the flu vaccine may still get the flu, but is usually a milder case than those who did not get the shot.
- ∇ Persons with weak immune systems and the elderly may not get as much protection from the flu shot.
- ∇ Protection from the flu is usually obtained about 2 to 3 weeks after the flu shot is received.

What Health Factors Should I Consider Before Taking The Flu Shot?

- Persons with **acute illness**, including an active infection or fever, should postpone immunization. A person who has mild illness (such as a mild cold) may have the flu shot.
- Persons with an **active neurological disorder** (e.g. recent worsening symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis) should delay immunization. The flu shot should be considered when the disease process has stabilized.
- Persons who have had **Guillain-Barré Syndrome** (GBS) within 6 to 8 weeks of a past flu shot should check with their physician regarding the flu shot.
- People who have had **severe Oculo-Respiratory Syndrome (ORS)**, (a reaction that includes sore throat, difficulty breathing, red eyes, cough, difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness and swelling of the face within 2-24 hours of the flu shot), should check with their physician regarding the flu shot. Vaccination is considered safe for those who have experienced mild or moderate symptoms of ORS.
- People taking **beta-blockers** (medication usually used to treat high blood pressure or heart disease), are at **no higher risk** of a **rare, severe allergic reaction** than others. However, if a person experiences anaphylaxis while taking beta-blockers, the reaction may be more severe and less responsive to the drug the nurse has to treat the reaction.
- Women, who are **pregnant**, should tell the nurse. It is important that you understand the risks and benefits of receiving the flu vaccine during pregnancy. The nurse will give you another Fact Sheet to read

How Will I Receive the Flu Shot?

- The flu shot will be injected in a muscle in the upper arm or thigh (young children). Please dress accordingly.

References: 2005 Manufacturer Product Monographs (VAXIGRIP, INFLUVAC and FLUVIRAL); Canadian Immunization Guide 6th Edition (2002); National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) statement on influenza vaccination for the 2005-2006 seasons.