

What is Influenza?

Commonly known as “the flu”, influenza is an infection that can be caused by several types of influenza viruses. These viruses spread easily during the winter months and infect the nose, throat and lungs. The symptoms have sudden onset, are far more serious than the common cold and include headache, chills and a dry cough followed by body aches and fever. The fever may decrease on the second or third day but full recovery from influenza may take a few weeks. Some people may carry the virus without getting sick themselves, but they can still pass it on to others who can get seriously ill.

What severe complications are associated with Influenza?

While most people recover fully, influenza may lead to more severe and life-threatening illnesses, such as pneumonia and even death.

What is the best way to prevent Influenza?

Good nutrition and exercise contribute to your general health; these alone will not protect you from the influenza virus. Immunization every fall is the only prevention measure that has been proven to prevent influenza and reduce complications caused by influenza. The vaccine provides protection for the current season only therefore it is recommended to have a ‘flu’ vaccination annually.

Clean, Cover, and Contain is always a good message to help prevent disease. Clean your hands, cover your coughs and sneezes and contain your illness by staying home to rest.

Who should get the Influenza vaccine?

Influenza vaccine is available to all individuals 6 months of age and older. Emphasis should be placed on immunizing those who are at increased risk for complications from influenza, and individuals who are capable of transmitting influenza to individuals at high risk of a severe influenza infection.

Those at higher risk of exposure to influenza or severe influenza disease include:

- All pregnant people.
- Adults and children with the following chronic health conditions:
 - cardiac or pulmonary disorders (including bronchopulmonary dysplasia, cystic fibrosis & asthma);
 - diabetes mellitus and other metabolic diseases;
 - cancer, immune compromising conditions (due to underlying disease and/or therapy);
 - renal disease;
 - anemia or hemoglobinopathy;
 - neurologic or neurodevelopment conditions;
 - BMI ≥ 40 ;
 - children and adolescents (age 6 months to 18 years) undergoing treatment for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid, because of the potential increase of Reye’s syndrome associated with influenza.
- People of any age who are residents of nursing homes and other chronic care facilities.
- People ≥ 65 years of age.
- All children 6 to 59 months of age.
- Indigenous Peoples

People in contact with individuals at high risk of complications from influenza, include:

- Health care and other care providers in facilities and community settings who, through their activities, are in contact with those at high risk of influenza complications.
- Household contacts (adults and children) of individuals at high risk of influenza-related complications (even if the individual at high risk has been immunized):
- Household contacts of individuals at high risk, as listed in the section above;
- Household contacts of infants < 6 months of age as these infants are at high risk of complications from influenza but cannot receive influenza vaccine; and
- Members of a household expecting a newborn during the influenza season.
- Those providing regular childcare to children ≤ 59 months of age, whether in or out of the home.
- Those who provide services within closed or relatively closed settings to persons at high risk.

Other groups recommended to receive influenza vaccine:

- People who provide essential community services.
- People who are or could be involved in culling operations of poultry infected with avian influenza

Who should NOT get the Influenza vaccine?

- People with moderate or severe acute illness.
- People with a known allergy to any component of the vaccine.
- People who have had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose.
- Infants less than 6 months of age.

What are the side effects of the Influenza vaccine?

All influenza vaccines are very safe. People who receive an injection may get a sore arm (redness, swelling and tenderness), others may have a fever, headache or muscle aches but these are mild and only last a day or two. Severe side effects and allergic reactions are rare. If you have other side effects, let your community/public health nurse know. You will be asked to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after you receive the influenza vaccine for observation.