

Seasonal Influenza Fact Sheet 2009/2010

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

What is Seasonal Influenza?

Seasonal influenza (commonly known as “the flu”) is a serious, acute respiratory illness that is caused by a virus. People who get influenza may have a fever, chills, cough, runny eyes, stuffy nose, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, extreme weakness and fatigue. Note: the elderly may not have a fever. Children can also have earaches, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

People of any age can get influenza. Illness due to influenza usually lasts two to seven days; sometimes longer in the elderly and in people with chronic diseases. Most people who get influenza are ill for only a few days. However, the cough and fatigue can persist for several weeks, making the return to full activity difficult. Some people can become very ill, possibly developing complications and requiring hospitalization.

Influenza spreads by respiratory droplets from infected persons, through coughing or sneezing. It is also spread through direct contact with surfaces contaminated by the influenza virus, such as toys, eating utensils, and unwashed hands.

How well does the vaccine protect against seasonal influenza?

When there is a good match between the influenza strains in the vaccine and the influenza strains circulating in the community, the vaccine can prevent influenza illness in about 70% to 90% of healthy children and adults. Studies have shown that influenza immunization decreases the incidence of pneumonia, hospital admission and death in the elderly.

Physician visits, hospitalization and death in high-risk persons less than 65 years of age are also reduced (*2008-2009 NACI Statement on Influenza*).

It takes about two weeks after the immunization to develop protection against influenza; protection may last up to one year. People who receive the vaccine can still get influenza, but if they do, it is usually milder. However, the vaccine will not protect against colds and other respiratory illnesses that may be mistaken for influenza, but are not caused by the influenza virus.

Can the vaccine cause seasonal influenza?

No. The vaccine does not contain the live virus so you cannot get influenza from the vaccine.

When should the seasonal influenza vaccine be given?

With the arrival of the novel pandemic H1N1 virus (pH₁N₁) and pending vaccine, the Ministry is recommending a **three-phased approach to influenza immunization this year:**

- **Phase I:** Immunize everyone aged 65+ in Ontario, and all residents (of all ages) in Long Term Care Homes (LTCHs), with seasonal influenza vaccine (in October 2009).
- **Phase II:** Immunize those who need and want the vaccine in Ontario, as per the nationally recommended sequenced groups, with the pandemic H1N1 vaccine (in November/December 2009).

- **Phase III:** “Catch-up” seasonal universal influenza immunization vaccine program (UIIP) will be offered to all those 6 months of age and older who live, work or attend school in Ontario, including anyone 65 years and older who did not receive the seasonal influenza vaccine during Phase 1 (this will likely occur in December 2009/January 2010).

Who can get the seasonal influenza vaccine?

All individuals aged 65 years or older, or those any age living in Long-Term Care Homes (LTCH's) are eligible to receive the publicly-funded seasonal influenza vaccine in Phase I. Following Phase II (pandemic H1N1 vaccination), anyone aged 6 months and older who lives, works or attends school in Ontario and anyone who did not receive the vaccine during Phase I is eligible to receive the publicly-funded seasonal influenza vaccine (Phase III).

How many doses of the seasonal influenza vaccine are needed?

Because the influenza virus changes often, it is necessary to get a seasonal influenza immunization every year, for protection against the new virus strains that may be circulating that year. Adults need only one dose of the seasonal influenza vaccine to be protected against the virus.

In Phase III, previously unimmunized children less than 9 years of age require two doses of the seasonal influenza vaccine, with an interval of 4 weeks. Children less than 9 years of age who have received one or more doses of influenza vaccine in the past are recommended to receive one dose per season thereafter.

Can the seasonal influenza vaccine be given at the same time as other vaccines?

Seasonal influenza vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines. The same limb may be used if necessary, but different sites on the limb should be chosen. Different administration sets (needle and syringe) must be used. However, it is **not** recommended that the seasonal vaccine be administered concurrently with the pandemic H1N1 vaccine.

Do I have to pay for a seasonal influenza immunization?

No. The seasonal influenza vaccine is available **free of charge** to individuals in Ontario, based on the three-phased approach to influenza immunization for the 2009/2010 season. The vaccine will be available through physicians and through community-based influenza immunization clinics which may be offered by public health units, Community Health Centres (CHCs), Community Care Access Centres (CCACs), Public Hospitals, Long-Term Care Homes (LTCHs), and pharmacies, as well as employer-sponsored clinics.

How can I keep track of my influenza immunizations and other immunizations?

After you receive your immunization, you should ask for a written record of your immunization from the doctor or nurse who administered your shot. Keep it in a safe place!

Who should not get the seasonal influenza vaccine?

The following persons should **not** get the seasonal influenza vaccine:

- Infants under six months of age (the current vaccine is not recommended for this age group).
- Anyone with a serious allergy (anaphylaxis) to eggs or egg products. A serious allergic reaction usually means that the person develops hives, swelling of the mouth and throat or has trouble breathing, a sudden drop in blood pressure, or shock after eating eggs or egg products.
- Anyone who has a severe allergy to any component of the vaccine. Your health care provider can tell you which components are in the specific vaccine. Some vaccines contain small quantities of antibiotics or preservatives.
- Anyone who had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of the influenza vaccine.

- It is not known whether the influenza vaccine causes an increased risk of recurrent Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) in persons who previously had GBS. Anyone who developed GBS within 8 weeks of a previous influenza immunization should avoid influenza immunization in the future.

The seasonal influenza vaccine should be temporarily delayed in the following persons:

- Anyone with a moderate to severe acute illness with fever should usually wait until the symptoms subside before being immunized.
- However, people with a minor illness with or without a fever (e.g. a cold) could still get the influenza vaccine.
- Immunization should generally be **delayed** in individuals with an evolving neurologic disorder, until the disease process has been stabilized.

What are the risks from seasonal influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing side effects, which can be either mild or, occasionally, severe. The risk of the vaccine causing serious harm is extremely small.

Most people who get the vaccine have either no side effects or mild side effects such as soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site. Life-threatening allergic reactions are very rare. If they do occur, it is within a few minutes to a few hours after receiving the vaccine.

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (or GBS)

GBS is a very uncommon disease that causes muscle paralysis and has been associated with certain infectious diseases. Overall, the risk of GBS occurring in association with immunization is small. In comparison to the small risk of GBS, the risk of illness and death associated with influenza is much greater.



Oculorespiratory Syndrome (ORS)

During the 2000-2001 season, a small number of people who received the vaccine developed a side effect called Oculorespiratory Syndrome or ORS. ORS is described as the onset of red eyes and/or respiratory symptoms (cough, wheeze, chest tightness, difficulty breathing, difficulty swallowing, hoarseness or sore throat) and/or swelling of the face, occurring **within 24 hours** of influenza immunization. Since 2000-2001, fewer cases of ORS have been reported.

Persons who experienced ORS symptoms in the past may be safely re-immunized with influenza vaccine except for those who have experienced ORS with severe lower respiratory symptoms (wheeze, chest tightness, difficulty breathing) within 24 hours of influenza immunization. These individuals should seek expert medical advice before being immunized again with the influenza vaccine.

When should I seek medical attention after immunization with the seasonal influenza vaccine?

You should seek medical attention if you believe that you, or someone in your care,

has had a reaction to a vaccine. **Any reaction to a vaccine should be reported to your health care provider who will report these occurrences to your local public health unit.**

Who should I talk to if I have any questions about seasonal influenza or any other vaccines?

If you are looking for general information about seasonal influenza or the vaccine, the province's Universal Influenza Immunization Program, or the location of a clinic near you, please call: 1-877-844-1944 (TTY#1-800-387-5559) or visit website:

www.gettheflushot.ca

If you have questions about the vaccine that are specific to your medical condition, you should ask your health care provider or call your local public health unit.

For additional information on influenza, please visit the following websites:

- a) Universal Influenza Immunization Program:
www.gettheflushot.ca
- b) Public Health Agency of Canada site:
National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) Statement 2008-2009
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/08pdf/acs-3.pdf>
- c) Canadian Coalition for Influenza Immunization Awareness and Promotion:
www.immunize.cpha.ca
- d) Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Influenza: Prevention and Control Home Page
www.cdc.gov/flu
- e) Canadian Pediatric Society: Recommendations for the use of Influenza Vaccine for Children.
www.cps.ca/English/statements/ID/ID04-01.htm



ServiceOntario, INFOline: 1-877-234-4343 toll free in Ontario (TTY: 1-800-387-5559)

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000 (TTY: 1-866-797-0007)

*Or call your **local public health unit.***

Version française disponible en communiquant avec le 1 877 234-4343 ATS: 1 800 387-5559

Web site: www.vaccincontrelagrippe.ca