

# Influenza (Flu) Vaccine

## Get protected, get immunized.

- Vaccines make your immune system stronger. They build antibodies to help prevent diseases.
- Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get these diseases.

## What is the influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine protects against the influenza virus.

## What is influenza?

Influenza is an infection of the nose, throat, and lungs that is caused by a virus. Symptoms start suddenly and may include:

- a fever and chills
- a sore throat or cough
- a headache
- muscle aches
- not feeling hungry or not wanting to eat (poor appetite)
- feeling tired

Other symptoms may include feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), vomiting (throwing up), or having loose stool (diarrhea). These are more common in young children. In some cases, influenza can lead to a lung infection (pneumonia) or make other health problems worse.

Even healthy, young people can get very sick or die from influenza.

The number of people who get sick with influenza is different year to year. On average each year, about 12,000 people in Canada have to stay in a hospital because of influenza and about 3,500 people die from it.

## How does it spread?

Influenza can spread in the following ways:

- A person with influenza sneezes, coughs, talks, or even breathes.
- You breathe in the virus.
- You touch something that has the virus on it (such as hands or a door knob), then touch your eyes, mouth, or nose.

You can spread influenza before symptoms start.

## How can I stop influenza from spreading?

To stop influenza from spreading:

- Get the influenza vaccine every year.
- Wash your hands with warm water and soap or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer often.
- Cover your cough or sneeze into your arm or a tissue, not your hand.
- Stay home when you are sick.

## Who should get the influenza vaccine?

Everyone is at risk of influenza. You should get the influenza vaccine if you are age 6 months or older.

Influenza can make you very sick and lead to other health problems, especially if:

- You have heart or lung conditions, diabetes, a weak immune system, a lot of extra weight, or other health problems.
- You live in a care facility, like a continuing care home.
- You are under age 5 years.
- You are age 65 years or older.
- You are pregnant.
- You are an Indigenous person.

It is important to get the influenza vaccine each year, especially if:

- You have a high risk of getting very sick from influenza.
- You have close contact with someone who is at high risk of getting very sick from influenza, such as family members and caregivers.
- You are a healthcare provider. (Getting the vaccine helps to protect you and the people you care for.)

The vaccine is free if you live, work, go to school, or are visiting in Alberta.

## How many doses do I need?

If you are under age 9 years and are getting the influenza vaccine for the first time, you need 2 doses, at least 4 weeks apart.

Everyone else needs only 1 dose of the influenza vaccine each influenza season. The season starts in late fall and lasts through the winter.

If you have had a stem cell transplant or are getting CAR T-cell therapy (a type of cancer treatment), talk to your healthcare provider to see how many doses you need, and when you can get them.

## Are there different types of influenza vaccines?

There are many types of influenza vaccines. Every year, Alberta Health looks at information about influenza to help them decide which vaccines to offer for free.

### High-dose and standard-dose influenza vaccine

There are 2 strengths of inactivated (killed) influenza vaccine: standard-dose and high-dose. Both vaccines protect against 4 types of influenza virus.

The **standard-dose** influenza vaccine is for most healthy people age 6 months to 64 years.

The **high-dose** influenza vaccine has more of the inactivated influenza virus than the standard-dose. It gives more protection against influenza for people with a higher risk of getting very sick:

- People age 65 years and older. Because your immune system changes as you age, you need a higher dose to get a better immune response than younger people.
- People age 18 to 64 years who have had CAR T-cell therapy, who have had a stem cell transplant, or who have had or will have an organ transplant.

Using the high-dose influenza vaccine in people under age 65 years is called “off-label use”. Off-label use means the vaccine is used differently than the way it was originally approved. Vaccine experts support this off-label use and have no safety concerns.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding/chestfeeding and you have had CAR T-cell therapy, a stem cell transplant, or have had or will have an organ transplant talk to your healthcare provider about which vaccine is recommended for you.

See reverse for more information.

## How well does the vaccine work?

How well the vaccine works is different each influenza season.

A new vaccine is made every year to protect against the 3 or 4 influenza viruses that are most likely to make you sick. Even when the vaccine does not exactly match the viruses that spread where you live, it can still help protect you from getting influenza or getting very sick from it.

The influenza vaccine is the best way to lower your risk of getting influenza and having related health problems. It can also help stop you from spreading it to others.

The influenza vaccine will start to protect you about 2 weeks after you get it.

## Where can I get the influenza vaccine?

Children under age 5 years and their families can get the influenza vaccine for free at Alberta Health Services influenza immunization clinics. Clinics are usually open from mid to late October to the end of March.

To find influenza immunization clinics where you live or to book an appointment, visit [ahs.ca/influenza](https://ahs.ca/influenza) or call Health Link at 811.

You can also get the influenza vaccine from many family doctors and pharmacists.

- Pharmacists give the influenza vaccine to anyone age 5 years and older.
- Family doctors give the influenza vaccine to anyone age 6 months and older.

Call your doctor or pharmacist to find out if they offer the vaccine.

If you want a type of influenza vaccine that is not free (for example, the nasal spray influenza vaccine), you may be able to buy it at a pharmacy. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is right for you. You can also check with your health insurance provider to see if they cover the cost.

## Are there side effects from the influenza vaccine?

There can be side effects from the influenza vaccine, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- redness, swelling, bruising, a hard spot, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- crying or getting upset easily
- feeling tired or unwell
- a headache
- a fever or chills
- body aches or sore joints
- poor appetite
- nausea, stomach pain, vomiting, or diarrhea

At least 1 out of 100 people who got this vaccine reported 1 or more of these side effects. In some cases, it is unknown if the vaccine caused these side effects.

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after your vaccine. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect after a vaccine. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

## How can I manage side effects?

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with a fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dose to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

## What if I had or am getting another type of vaccine?

You can get the influenza vaccine at the same time, any time before, or any time after most vaccines. However, certain vaccines have a waiting period. If you had another vaccine in the last 2 weeks, check with your healthcare provider about when you can get the influenza vaccine.

## Who should not get the influenza vaccine?

You may not be able to get this vaccine if:

- You have an allergy to any part of the vaccine (except eggs). If you have an allergy to eggs, you can safely get the vaccine.
- You had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it.

If you have allergies or have had a side effect from this vaccine, check with your doctor or a public health nurse before you get the vaccine.

Although you can get the vaccine if you have a mild illness, such as a cold or fever, you should stay home until you are feeling better to prevent spreading your illness to others.

## I have a fear of needles. How can I prepare for my immunization?

Many adults and children are afraid of needles. You can do many things before, during, and after immunization to be more comfortable.



Scan the QR code, visit [ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort](https://ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort), or call Health Link at 811 for information.

## For more information about immunization



Call Health Link at 811



Scan the QR code or go to [ahs.ca/immunize](https://ahs.ca/immunize)



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