

# Influenza (FLU) Vaccine

**Immunization protects you from disease. 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 this disease.**

## What is the influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine protects against the influenza virus.

## Who should get the influenza vaccine?

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

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
- live in a care facility, such as a nursing home
- are under age 5 years
- are age 65 years or older
- are pregnant
- are Indigenous

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

- have a high risk for influenza
- have close contact with someone who has a high risk, such as family members and caregivers
- are a healthcare provider (it helps protect you and the people you care for)

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

## How many doses do I need?

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

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

## 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.

If you are age 65 years and older, you will get the high-dose inactivated (killed) influenza vaccine. The high-dose vaccine has more inactivated influenza virus than the regular (standard-dose) vaccine. If you are age 65 years and older, you are at high risk for serious (severe) illness from influenza. Because your immune system changes as you age, you may not respond to immunization as well as younger people. The higher dose means that you will have a better response to the vaccine to protect you against influenza.

If you are under age 65 years, you will get the standard-dose inactivated influenza vaccine.

Both vaccines protect against 4 types of influenza virus.

Your healthcare provider will let you know which vaccine you can get.

## 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 do end up spreading 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 health problems related to influenza. 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 the vaccine.

## 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 (AHS) Influenza Immunization Clinics (from late October to the end of March).

To find influenza clinics where you live, visit [www.ahs.ca/influenza](http://www.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 9 years and older. Some may also give the influenza vaccine to those younger than age 9 years.

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, 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, 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
- not feeling hungry or not wanting to eat (poor appetite)
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), stomach pain, vomiting (throwing up), or loose stool (diarrhea)

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.

- Children under the age of 18 years should **not** take aspirin because it can cause serious health problems.
- 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.

## 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)
- had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it

You can still get the vaccine if you have an allergy to eggs or a mild illness, such as a cold or fever. Always tell your healthcare provider if you have allergies or if you have had a side effect from a vaccine in the past.

Check with your doctor or a public health nurse before you get the vaccine.

### For More Information



Call Health Link at 811



Go to [ImmunizeAlberta.ca](https://immunizealberta.ca)



Go to [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca)



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

# Facts about influenza

## 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
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), vomiting (throwing up) and loose stool (diarrhea) - This is 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.

Each year, more than 12,000 people in Canada have to stay in the hospital and 3,500 will die from influenza.

## How does it spread?

Influenza spreads:

- when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or even talks
- if you breathe in the virus
- if you touch something that has the virus on it (like hands or a door knob), then touch your eyes, mouth, or nose

It is important to know that you and others can spread influenza before symptoms start.

## How can I stop influenza from spreading?

To stop influenza from spreading:

- get immunized
- 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