Inactivated Influenza Vaccine
Public Health Branch – Factsheet

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention. Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause disease.

Why should I get the flu shot?
Getting the flu shot every year is the best way to protect yourself against seasonal influenza (the flu). When you get immunized, you also help protect others as well by reducing the spread of the influenza virus.

The flu can seem similar to a common cold, but the symptoms of the flu are usually more severe. Fever, body aches, extreme tiredness and a dry cough are more common with the flu than with a common cold. Also, the flu is more likely to lead to serious problems like pneumonia, bacterial infections and hospitalization.

What is the flu?
The flu is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. Not everyone who gets the flu develops symptoms but they still may be able to spread it to others, especially if they cough or sneeze. It can spread easily from one person to another through coughing, sneezing or sharing food or drinks. You can also get the flu by touching objects contaminated with flu virus and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose.

It’s important to practice good respiratory hygiene (cover your nose and mouth with your forearm or a tissue when you cough) and wash your hands often with soap and water or clean them with alcohol-based sanitizer if soap and water are not available, especially after coughing and sneezing.

The flu season in Manitoba usually begins in the fall and lasts into the spring. For your protection, you should get immunized early in the fall.

What is the Flu Vaccine?
There are many different strains of flu virus. The vaccine cannot protect against all of them. Every year, scientists monitor the global spread of flu and decide which three flu strains will likely cause the most illness during flu season. Those three strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year so each year, the vaccine is different.

It is important to get the flu shot every year because the viruses change from year-to-year and the protection provided by the vaccine decreases over time.

What is the inactivated influenza vaccine?
The inactivated influenza vaccine is made of killed influenza viruses and is given by injection (needle). Like other influenza vaccines, the vaccine does not protect against other viruses or bacteria that cause colds or stomach flu.

Who should get the inactivated influenza vaccine?
Manitoba provides seasonal influenza vaccine free of charge to all Manitobans over 6 months of age.

An annual flu shot is especially important for Manitobans at increased risk of serious illness from the flu, their caregivers and close contacts. This includes:

- Seniors aged 65 years or older
- Residents of personal care homes or long-term care facilities
- Children six months to five years of age
- Those with chronic illness such as:
  - an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
  - a condition that makes it difficult to breathe
  - children 6 months to adolescents 18 years of age on long term acetylsalicylic acid (i.e. aspirin) therapy.

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- other chronic medical conditions (ex. diabetes, mental disabilities)
  - Pregnant women
  - Health care workers and first responders
  - Individuals of Aboriginal ancestry
  - People who are severely overweight or obese

*Healthy children 2 to 17 years of age should be considered for the live attenuated influenza vaccine. Please see the Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine Factsheet for more information.*

Children 6 months to 8 years of age who have never received a seasonal influenza vaccine need 2 doses. The second dose is important to raise their level of protection and should be given 4 weeks after the first dose.

**Who should NOT get the inactivated influenza vaccine?**

Children under six months of age.

People with a high fever should not get immunized. But you can still get the flu shot if you have a mild illness like a cold.

Speak to a public health nurse or doctor if you have had a serious reaction to a previous dose of any vaccine, including Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), or if you have any severe allergies, including egg protein.

**Possible side-effects of the flu vaccine.**

Vaccines are known to be very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get the flu.

It is common to have soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Some people may have fever, chills or fatigue. These are mild reactions and usually last one to two days. Acetaminophen (Tylenol® or Tempra®) can be given for fever or soreness.

ASA (Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye’s Syndrome.

**Rare side-effects**

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment.

**Other rare conditions**

In past flu seasons, some people experienced one or more of the following symptoms associated with Oculorespiratory Syndrome (ORS): red eyes, shortness of breath, chest tightness, cough, sore throat, or swelling of the face. These symptoms usually appeared within 24 hours of getting the flu shot and were gone within two days.

Seasonal flu shots have been associated with Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), which is a form of paralysis that is usually temporary. It most commonly occurs after infection, but in rare cases can also occur in approximately one out of every million flu vaccinations.

**Report any serious or unexpected side-effects to a public health nurse or doctor.**

**Your record of protection**

Make sure your doctor or public health nurse updates your child’s immunization record card, after getting them immunized.

Information about the immunizations your children receive may be recorded in the provincial immunization registry. This computerized database allows your child’s doctor or public health nurse to find out what immunizations your child has had or needs to have. Information collected in MIMS may be used to produce immunization records, or notify you or your doctor if your child has missed a particular immunization. Public Health officials may use the information to monitor how well different vaccines work in preventing disease. If you need information on the immunizations that your child has received, contact your doctor, local public health unit or nursing station.
For more information on the flu or the inactivated influenza vaccine:
Talk to your doctor or public health nurse.
Call Health Links-Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.
Or visit:
Manitoba Public Health website
www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/index.html
Public Health Agency of Canada website
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/index-eng.php