

## Flu Vaccine FAQs

*This is a summary and does not tell you everything about the flu vaccine. Please contact your doctor or pharmacist if you have further questions.*

### **Why should people get vaccinated against the flu?**

The flu is an illness caused by the influenza virus. It infects the upper airways (nose, throat) and lungs. It can be a serious illness which can cause poor health or death.

Symptoms can include fever, weakness, headache, sore throat, muscle pain, runny nose, extreme tiredness and cough. The benefits of getting the flu shot includes reducing the risk of flu illness, need for hospitalizations and decreasing the risk of flu-related deaths in children. Getting the flu shot is one of the best ways to protect yourself and those around you from getting the flu.

### **How is the flu vaccine created?**

The World Health Organization makes a yearly recommendation which flu-virus types are likely to circulate and should be included in the vaccine. The virus is grown in chicken eggs. Then the virus is killed, broken apart or split into antigens, concentrated and purified. Antibiotics and gelatin are not used in this process. If the vaccine is packaged in a multidose vial, thimerosal is added to stabilize the vaccine. The flu vaccine and its containers do not contain latex. This year the vaccine contain either 3 or 4 strains of influenza antigens.

### **Does the flu vaccine cause the flu?**

No, there are no infectious particles in the vaccine. They were killed during the manufacturing process.

### **How does the flu vaccine work?**

After you get a flu shot, your immune system produces antibodies against the strains of virus in the vaccine. The immune system takes 2-4 weeks to work. These antibodies will protect you if you come in contact with influenza virus, however the immune systems response varies and some may have better protection than others. If you are over 65 yrs old you may get the 'high dose' flu vaccine which has 4 times the amount of antigens to stimulate a better response. This 'high dose' vaccine has only been approved for the use in patients over 65 yrs old.

### **Why should I get the flu vaccine yearly?**

You need to get the flu vaccine yearly for several reasons

- The antibodies you create only last for a year
- Each year the strain of influenza can be different or mutate from the previous year

### **Do I need a second dose of the flu vaccine this year?**

Only children under 9 years old, who have never had a flu shot before, need a second dose. This should be given 1 month after the first. Please contact the clinic to set up the second dose.

### **Who should not get the flu shot? (Contraindications)**

The flu shot should not be given to children under 6 months old.

You should not get the flu shot if you have a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to egg proteins/products, previous flu vaccine or any ingredient in the vaccine. A list of ingredients is available, please ask a staff member if you would like to review it.

### **Warnings and precautions**

Please speak with a staff member if you have any of the following:

- severe infection with high temperature
- bleeding problem or bruise easily
- weakened immune system due to infection or medications
- fainted before or after a previous injection
- recently received any other vaccines
- Guillan-Barre (GBS) occurred within 6 weeks of the flu vaccine
- pregnant or breast feeding

**What are the side effects I might experience?**

*This is a list of the most common side effects. It does not include all side effects. If you wish to know the full list, please consult the product monograph for the vaccine you are interested in.*

Pain, tenderness, redness, swelling, warmth, bruising, muscle aches, headache, feeling unwell, fever. Infants and young children may also experience irritability, abnormal crying, drowsiness, appetite loss, vomiting, shivering.

Side effects often occur within 3 days and resolve within 3 days.

**What are the risks of getting the flu shot?**

The risk of the flu shot causing serious harm is extremely small and are much less than the risks associated with illness. Like any medication, you can have a reaction to the vaccine.

-The risk of a severe allergic reaction is very rare

-infection at the site of injection

-side effect from the vaccine

- Guillan-Barre (GBS) is a very rare side effect. This is an autoimmune reaction attacking the nervous system. It causes weakness and abnormal sensations. Most patients fully recover

**What are signs of an allergic reaction?**

Please contact medical care urgently if you experience

-itchy rash of the hands or feet

-swelling of the eyes and face

-difficulty breathing or swallowing

-sudden drop in blood pressure (dizziness, light headed, fainting, blurred or fading vision, nausea, fatigue, lack of concentration)

-shock (confusion, cold, clammy, pale skin, rapid shallow breathing, weak or rapid pulse)

-loss of consciousness

**Reporting suspected side effects**

To monitor vaccine safety, the Public Health Agency of Canada collects information on serious and unexpected case reports on adverse events following immunization.

Should you experience an adverse event, please ask your doctor or pharmacist to complete the Adverse Events Following Immunization Form (AEFI).

If you have any questions or have difficulties, please contact the Vaccine Safety Section at the Public Health Agency of Canada

1-866-844-0018.