

SEASONAL INFLUENZA VACCINE (“Flu shot”)

What is the seasonal influenza vaccine?

The seasonal influenza vaccine protects against viruses that cause influenza (flu). Each year, scientists monitor the global spread of flu and decide which flu strains will likely cause the most illness during flu season. Those strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year, so each year the vaccine is different.

The vaccine does not protect against other viruses or bacteria that cause colds or stomach illness, such as stomach flu. Several influenza vaccines are approved for use in Canada each year.

What are the benefits of the vaccine?

Getting immunized each year is the best way to protect against influenza infection, a serious and sometimes fatal disease. When you and your family are immunized, you help protect others as well.

What does the Flu shot protect against?

The flu shot offered in New Brunswick provides protection against four different influenza viruses:

- two influenza A viruses (H1N1 and H3N2)
- two influenza B viruses.

The high dose vaccine is licensed specifically for people 65 years and older and has four times the concentration of influenza virus antigen as the standard inactivated influenza vaccine to give the older people better protection.

How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine is given as an injection into the upper arm in older children and adults; and into the thigh in infants.

Does New Brunswick have a Universal seasonal influenza Program?

Yes, seasonal influenza vaccine is available free of charge to all New Brunswick residents. New Brunswickers can access influenza vaccine through a variety of immunization providers such as physicians, nurse practitioners, midwives, pharmacists, and Public Health.

Fluzone® High-Dose vaccine is a targeted program for those NB residents 65 years and over.

Who should not receive the vaccine?

Anyone who has:

- had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of influenza vaccine, or any component with the exception of egg, of the vaccine or its container.
- developed Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) within six weeks of getting any influenza vaccine. GBS is a rare condition that can result in weakness and paralysis of the body’s muscles.

Children younger than six months should not get the influenza vaccine because it is not licensed and not known to be effective for this age group.

NOTE - Egg allergy is no longer considered a reason not to get the flu vaccine.

What are the possible side effects of the vaccine?

As with any vaccine, side effects can occur. Those most common may include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. In some people, symptoms can include mild fever, headache and aching muscles starting six to 12 hours after getting the vaccine and lasting about one to two days.

Rare side-effects: As with any vaccine, there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. For this reason, it is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. If symptoms occur after you leave the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment.**

Any unexpected or serious reaction to a vaccine should be reported to your health-care provider.

What can be done for common side effects to the vaccine?

- Applying a cold compress at the injection site may reduce discomfort.
- For discomfort and fever, you may take or give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol) or Ibuprofen (Advil) may also be used following the manufacturer's instructions.

NEVER give *Acetylsalicylic acid* (ASA or Aspirin®) to children younger than 18 years because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's syndrome.

What else you need to know

- Please inform the immunization provider if you or your child have any health problems or allergies.
- Children six months to less than 9 years who have never had an influenza vaccine need to have two doses at least four weeks apart.
- Your immunization provider will provide you with a record of immunization. Please keep this record in a safe place and bring it with you to each immunization appointment.
- Individuals 16 years and older can give their own consent. Children younger than 16 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.
- The vaccine given by injection cannot give you "the flu" because it does not contain a live virus. For more information please visit your health care provider or check the website at: www.gnb.ca/flu

Useful websites:

- Government of New-Brunswick www.gnb.ca/health
- Public Health Agency <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza.html>
- Public Health Agency <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca>