

2021-2022 Influenza Vaccine Fact Sheet

FluLaval Tetra, FluZone® QIV, Flucelvax® Quad, Afluria® Tetra, FluZone® QIV-HD, Fluad® TIV-adj

Influenza Illness

Influenza virus is very contagious. The flu spreads by respiratory droplets, causing an infection of the nose, throat and lungs. The symptoms are sudden onset of fever, sore throat, runny nose, cough, headache, muscle aches, feeling tired or poor appetite. In children, vomiting and diarrhea can occur. Serious complications from flu illness are greatest in babies under two-years of age; pregnant people; older adults; and people with health conditions. On very rare occasions, the influenza virus can lead to *Guillain-Barré Syndrome*, a neurological disorder.



Vaccine Benefits

Flu vaccination is recommended for everyone aged 6 months and older. How well the vaccine works each year, depends on a person's immune system and the match between the circulating virus strains and the strains in the vaccine. The vaccine can provide some cross protection even when the match is not exact. In general, flu vaccines are about 50% effective in preventing flu illness in healthy adults. The vaccine is still the best protection against the flu. The flu vaccine cannot cause influenza because it does not contain any live virus. It takes two weeks for your body to develop an immune response from the vaccine.

Children under the age of 9, getting the flu vaccine for the first time need a second dose, given at least four weeks after the first dose.

New this year: Fluad®, a vaccine for people 65 years of age and over. This vaccine is an adjuvanted vaccine that protects against two influenza A viruses and one influenza B virus. An adjuvant is a substance added to a vaccine that helps to boost your immune response and offers stronger protection.

Vaccines for Adults 65+

Influenza can make older adults very sick. Two vaccines are approved just for seniors to give better protection against the flu. A high-dose flu vaccine (FluZone® QIV-HD) is the preferred choice for adults 65 years and older. It protects against four strains of the influenza virus. If this vaccine is not available, then Fluad® is recommended. Both of these vaccines may cause more soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given, lasting a few days longer than the standard vaccine. If neither of these vaccines are available, do not delay in getting vaccinated. All flu vaccines provide good protection.

Side Effects and Risks

It is much safer to get the flu vaccine than to get the flu. Flu vaccines are safe and well-tolerated. Side effects are usually mild and last a few days. Common side effects include pain, redness and swelling at the injection site; headache, fever, muscle aches, joint pain or feeling tired. Side effects in children include irritability, drowsiness or loss of appetite.

In rare cases, serious allergic reactions (anaphylactic) can occur. Seek medical attention if you have trouble breathing, rash or swelling of the face and throat. Allergic reactions can be treated and are usually temporary. The risk of *Oculo-Respiratory Syndrome* or *Guillain-Barré Syndrome* after flu vaccination is very low, about one case in a million flu shots.

Precautions

Always tell your provider if you have allergies or if you have had side effects from a vaccine in the past. This vaccine is not for people with previous allergic reactions to flu vaccine (anaphylaxis) or had *Guillain-Barré Syndrome* within 6 weeks after flu vaccination. People with a history of *Oculo-Respiratory Syndrome* can get the vaccine but should speak with their doctor first.

Getting your COVID-19 Vaccine at the same time as your Influenza Vaccine

COVID-19 vaccines may be given at the same time as other vaccines. There is only limited information about getting both vaccines at the same time. However, there are no safety concerns identified when routine vaccines are given at the same time or within days of each other. There may be increased temporary side effects when a COVID-19 vaccine and another vaccine are given at the same time or within days of each other. If you prefer to only receive one vaccine during your visit, you should receive the COVID-19 vaccine first.

For more information

Talk to your health care provider, or visit toronto.ca/health.