

High-dose Seasonal Influenza (Flu) Vaccine for People Aged 65 and Older

Public Health – Fact Sheet

Immunization is one of the most important accomplishments in public health. Immunizations help eliminate and control the spread of infections and diseases. Vaccines help your immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause disease.

What is seasonal influenza (the flu)?

Seasonal influenza (the flu) is a respiratory infection caused by a virus. Not everyone who gets the flu develops symptoms, but they can still spread the flu to others. The flu may seem like other respiratory viruses or the common cold. However, the symptoms are usually more severe than the common cold. These symptoms could include sudden high fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, sore throat, and dry cough. Nausea and upset stomach may also occur, especially in young children.

The flu can be a serious and sometimes fatal condition in older adults. This is because an older adult's immune system gradually declines in its ability to fight off infections. Severe flu can cause prolonged hospital stays and deaths due to pneumonia or heart attacks. Individuals recovering from severe flu are less able to do normal activities such as grocery shopping and walking.

The flu can spread easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing, or sharing food or drinks. You can also get the flu by touching objects contaminated with the flu virus and then touching your mouth, eyes, or nose. For this reason, it is important to cover your nose and mouth with your forearm when you cough or sneeze. Avoid touching your face and perform hand hygiene often. Hand hygiene can be done by washing your hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after coughing and sneezing.

The flu season occurs each year. In Manitoba, it usually begins in the fall and lasts into the spring. For your protection, and the protection of those around you, you should get immunized with the flu vaccine early in the fall before the flu arrives in Manitoba.

What is the high-dose flu vaccine and how is it different from the standard-dose vaccine?

Every year, scientists track the global spread of flu. They use this data to predict which flu strains will likely cause the most illness in the next flu season. These strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year. As a result, the vaccine can be different each year. For this reason, and because protection provided by the vaccine decreases over time, it is important to get the flu vaccine every year.

The flu vaccine cannot offer protection against other viral or bacterial infections including illnesses like the common cold, stomach flu, or other respiratory illnesses including COVID-19.

Manitoba currently offers standard-and high-dose flu vaccines for older adults. Both vaccines are given by injection (needle). Neither vaccine has the live flu virus in it. They can protect against four flu strains predicted to cause the most flu illness.

The high-dose flu vaccine contains four times the amount of influenza virus proteins (or antigens). The antigen is the part of the vaccine that helps your body build up immunity. The high-dose flu vaccine is safe and effective and produces a stronger immune response than the standard dose. This is important for people aged 65 years and older who often do not have as strong an immune response as people younger than 65 years of age.

Why should people aged 65 years and older get the high-dose flu vaccine?

The human immune system declines with age, which also means a lower immune response to standard dose flu vaccine. The higher amounts of influenza virus proteins (antigens) in the high-dose flu vaccine can boost immune response in older adults against flu. This can provide a higher level of protection against severe flu and its complications. It is recommended that Manitobans 65 years and older receive a high-dose flu vaccine every year. It is available free of charge.

You should get immunized early in the fall before the flu starts to circulate.

Who should NOT get the high-dose flu vaccine?

The following individuals should not receive the flu vaccine:

- anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of any flu vaccine
- anyone who has a severe allergic reaction to any ingredient of any flu vaccine (except eggs)

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- anyone who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) within six weeks after receiving any flu vaccine.

Please visit the vaccine manufacturer's product monograph (link provided below) for specific details about the vaccine's ingredients. You can also speak with your health-care provider or immunizer.

The high-dose flu vaccine is approved for use in those 65 years of age and older. People under the age of 65 should not be vaccinated with the high-dose flu vaccine; instead, they should get the standard dose flu vaccine.

What are the possible side-effects of the high-dose flu vaccine?

Health Canada approves vaccines based on an in-depth review of quality and safety.

The high-dose flu vaccine contains more flu virus proteins (antigens) than the standard-dose flu vaccine, therefore it may cause more soreness, redness, or swelling where the vaccine was given. However, these symptoms are mild and temporary. Other common side-effects are fever, headache, and tiredness. Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) can be given for fever or soreness.

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, seek immediate medical attention.

Report any serious or unexpected side effects to a health-care provider.

Your record of protection

All immunizations are recorded in a person's immunization record in Manitoba's Immunization Registry.

This registry enables:

- your health-care provider to find out which immunizations you or your child(ren) have received,
- the production of immunization records or notification to you about overdue vaccines,
- public health officials to monitor how well vaccines work in preventing disease.

You can get your immunization record by submitting a request online via forms.gov.mb.ca/immunization-update-request. Your immunization record will be mailed to you. You may also be able to get a copy by:

- contacting your local public health office; or
- checking if your local medical clinic or physician's office can provide it to you; or
- asking at a local nursing station or health centre.

For a listing of public health offices please visit: manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html.

The Personal Health Information Act protects your information and/or that of your child(ren). You can have your personal health information and/or that of your child(ren) hidden from view from health-care providers. For more information, please refer to manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/surveillance/phims.html or contact your local public health office to speak with a public health nurse.

For more information on the flu or the flu vaccine:

- talk to your health care provider; or
- call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257; or
- visit:

Manitoba's Seasonal Influenza Website:

manitoba.ca/flu

Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Public Health Fact Sheet:

manitoba.ca/flu

Health Canada's Influenza Website:

canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza.html

Links to the product monographs for all the seasonal influenza vaccines available in Manitoba can be found at:

manitoba.ca/flu