

SEASONAL INFLUENZA VACCINE (“Flu shot”)

What is the seasonal influenza vaccine?

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against influenza (flu) viruses. Each year, scientists determine which flu strains are likely to cause illness and those strains are then added to the vaccine for the season. Many approved influenza vaccines are available in Canada annually.

What are the benefits of the influenza vaccine?

Getting your flu vaccine every year is important because the viruses can change from year to year, and the protection provided by the previous vaccine decreases over time. 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 influenza vaccine protect against?

All of the flu vaccines offered in New Brunswick provide protection against four different influenza viruses:

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

The **high dose influenza 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 elderly better protection.

How is the vaccine given?

The standard seasonal flu vaccine is given as an injection into the upper arm in older children and adults, and into the thigh in infants.

Most flu vaccines are “flu shots” given with a needle, usually in the arm, however this year, the province is introducing an intranasal influenza vaccine (FluMist) as an alternative to the traditional needle-based influenza vaccine for individuals ranging in age from two to 17 years old and is meant for children who have a fear of needles.

For more information on the nasal spray influenza vaccine FluMist contact your local Public Health Office or pharmacist to find out if your child is eligible.

Does New Brunswick have a universal seasonal influenza program?

Yes, the seasonal influenza vaccine is available free of charge to all New Brunswick residents.

NB residents can obtain the vaccine from a variety of sources, including doctors, nurse practitioners, midwives’ pharmacists, and Public Health Offices. In addition, vaccines are distributed on-site for long-term care residents (anyone living in a nursing home or an adult residential facility).

Out-of-province students can also get their flu shots through student health services at their respective post-secondary institutions. New residents and non-residents without a Medicare card can get flu shots free of charge from a pharmacist.

Who should not receive the influenza vaccine?

The standard influenza vaccine should not be given to anyone who:

- Had a life-threatening reaction (such as anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of the influenza vaccine.
- Has a history of Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) within six weeks of receiving any influenza vaccine. GBS is a rare condition that can lead to muscle weakness and paralysis.
- Children below six months of age as it is not licensed or known to be effective for these age groups.
- NOTE: individuals with egg allergies can receive flu vaccine.

What are the possible side effects of the vaccines?

Common side effects of the vaccine may include soreness, redness, and swelling at the injection site. Mild fever, headache, and muscle aches may occur within six to 12 hours of vaccination and last for about one to two days.

Less common but serious side effects: Extremely rare cases of life-threatening allergic reactions, known as anaphylaxis, can occur. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue, or lips. It is important to remain at the clinic for 15 minutes after receiving any vaccine to monitor for such reactions. If symptoms occur after leaving the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment.**

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

- Applying a cold compress at the injection site may reduce discomfort.
- For discomfort and fever, you can take or give your child medicine by following the manufacturer's instructions. Ask your healthcare provider what medicine is best.

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 do 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 old 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 cannot give you "the flu" because it does not contain a live virus.

For more information visit:

- Government of New Brunswick at www.gnb.ca/flu
- Public Health Agency <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/flu-influenza.html>
- Canadian Pediatric Society <https://cps.ca>
- PHAC: [A Parent's Guide to Vaccination](#)