

What is Influenza

Influenza (commonly known as “the flu”) is a serious, acute respiratory infection that is caused by a virus. People who get influenza have fever, chills, cough, runny eyes, stuffy nose, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, extreme weakness and fatigue. Illness due to influenza usually lasts 2–7 days and sometimes longer in the elderly and in people with chronic conditions. The cough and fatigue can persist for several weeks, making the return to full activity difficult.

People of any age can get the flu. Most people who get the flu are ill for only a few days. However, some people can become very ill, and need to go to an emergency room or to the doctor’s office. Flu spreads through respiratory droplets from infected persons when they cough and sneeze. It is also spread through direct contact with surfaces contaminated by the influenza virus, such as toys, eating utensils, and unwashed hands.

How to protect myself

- Get the vaccine
 - Flu vaccination is between 50-80% effective in preventing influenza in healthy children and adults. It is less effective in seniors but it dramatically reduces their risk of complications, such as pneumonia from influenza.
- Take precautions
 - Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm running water, especially before eating or preparing food, and after blowing your nose or using the washroom. Keep an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (gel or wipes) handy at home, work and in your car to clean your hands regularly.
 - Covering your coughs and sneezes will help prevent spreading an infection to others.
 - Stay home if you are sick.

What is FluMist®

FluMist® (sometimes called LAIV for Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine) is an Intranasal (nasal spray) flu vaccine that was approved for use in Canada in 2010 for those 2-59 years of age. It has been used widely on children in the U.S. for the past 10 years.

For children 2–under 9 years of age without previous history of influenza vaccination, for both FluMist® and the “flu shot”, two doses must be given four weeks apart in order to receive protection.

FluMist® is provided as 0.1 mL sprayed into each nostril.

FluMist® or Injection Flu Vaccine

FluMist is different from injectable influenza vaccine (also called the “flu shot”) because it contains weakened live influenza viruses instead of killed viruses and is administered by nasal spray instead of injection. The nasal spray flu vaccine contains four different live (but weakened) influenza viruses. When the viruses are sprayed into the nose, they stimulate the body’s immune system to develop protective antibodies that will prevent infection with the influenza virus.

Public funding

FluMist is available free of charge for children 2-17 years.

Who SHOULD NOT get FluMist®

- Anyone who has a known allergy or is sensitive to any component of the vaccine.
- Those with past reaction or hypersensitivity to a previous influenza immunization.

- Those <2 years of age and those >59 years of age.
- Individuals with severe asthma (defined as currently on oral or high dose inhaled glucocorticosteroids or active wheezing) or those with medically attended wheezing in the seven days prior to vaccination.
- Children and adolescents (2 –17 years of age) currently receiving aspirin or aspirin-containing therapy because of the association of Reye’s syndrome with aspirin and wild-type influenza infection. It is recommended that aspirin-containing products in children less than 18 years of age be delayed for four weeks after receipt of LAIV.
- Pregnant women - because Flumist® is a live weakened vaccine and there is a lack of safety data in pregnancy at this time. However, it is safe for breastfeeding women.
- Persons with immune compromising conditions, due to underlying disease and/or therapy, as Flumist® vaccine contains live weakened virus.

When should I call my doctor

You should seek medical attention if you believe that you, or someone in your care, have had an unexpected or serious reaction to a vaccine. **Any reaction to a vaccine should be reported to your health care provider who will report these occurrences to your local public health unit.**

Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or contact Public Health and Emergency Services at 519-575-4400.

What are the risks of the influenza vaccine

The influenza vaccine, like any medicine, can cause either mild or rarely severe side effects. The risk of the vaccine causing serious harm is extremely small.

Most people who get the vaccine have either no side effects or mild side effects such as runny nose or nasal congestion.

Accessible formats of this document are available upon request.

Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services

Infectious Disease Program

519-575-4400