

## What is Influenza?

Commonly known as “the flu”, influenza is an infection that can be caused by several types of influenza viruses. These viruses spread easily during the winter months and infect the nose, throat and lungs. The symptoms have sudden onset, are far more serious than the common cold and include headache, chills and a dry cough followed by body aches and fever. The fever may decrease on the second or third day but full recovery from influenza may take a few weeks. Some people may carry the virus without getting sick themselves but they can still pass it on to others who can get seriously ill.

## What severe complications are associated with Influenza?

While most people recover fully, influenza may lead to more severe and life-threatening illnesses, such as pneumonia and even death.

## What is the best way to prevent Influenza?

Good nutrition and exercise contribute to your general health; these alone will not protect you from the influenza virus. Immunization every fall is the only prevention measure that has been proven to prevent influenza and reduce complications caused by influenza. The vaccine provides protection for the current season only therefore it is recommended to have a ‘flu’ vaccination annually. *Clean, Cover, and Contain* is always a good message to help prevent disease. Clean your hands cover your coughs and sneezes and contain your illness by staying home to rest.

## Who should get the Influenza vaccine?

While the Newfoundland and Labrador immunization program recommends and provides influenza vaccine for all persons 6 months of age and older; influenza vaccine is especially important for people who are at risk of developing complications from influenza. It is also important to immunize people who are able to spread influenza to those who are at higher risk of influenza-related complications such as health care providers and other caregivers. Some of the high risk groups include people with chronic conditions requiring doctor’s care, persons who are morbidly obese, those in residential care, children age 6 to 59 months, persons age 60 years and over, pregnant women, Aboriginal people, health care workers, household contacts of people at high risk of influenza complications, essential services workers and poultry and swine workers. Immunization should not be delayed because of minor acute illness, with or without fever.

## Who should NOT get the Influenza vaccine?

- People with moderate or severe acute illness.
- People with a known allergy to any component of the vaccine.
- People who have had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose in the past.
- Infants less than 6 months of age.

## What are the side effects of the Influenza vaccine?

All influenza vaccines are very safe. People who receive an injection may get a sore arm (redness, swelling and tenderness), others may have a fever, headache or muscle aches but these are mild and only last a day or two. Severe side effects and allergic reactions are rare. If you have other side effects, let your community/public health nurse know. You will be asked to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after you receive the influenza vaccine for observation.