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## **Seasonal Influenza (Flu) Vaccine: Fluviral®/Vaxigrip®**

### **Who should get the seasonal flu vaccine?**

- Everyone 6 months of age and older can benefit from getting the seasonal flu vaccine.
- The vaccine is *especially* recommended for individuals who are at high risk of influenza-related complications and those who may spread the flu to those at high risk.

### **What is influenza?**

- Influenza (commonly known as ‘the flu’) is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by the influenza virus.
- It causes high fever, headache, loss of appetite, muscle aches, weakness, chills, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion and sneezing. The flu is much worse than the common cold, and usually lasts 5 to 10 days. The cough and fatigue can last for many weeks, making the return to normal activities difficult.
- The flu can be a serious illness for some people. It can lead to pneumonia, hospitalization, and even death especially among people over the age of 65 and those under 2 years of age. People with chronic medical conditions such as heart or lung problems or diabetes are also at higher risk of these complications.
- Pregnant women are also at higher risk of complications from influenza.

### **How does influenza spread?**

- The flu spreads easily from infected persons through coughing and sneezing, or by touching contaminated surfaces such as toys, doorknobs, eating utensils, and unwashed hands.
- You may not know at first that you have the flu virus. It may be a day or even a week before you get sick, and in that time you can spread the flu to others.

### **How well does the seasonal flu vaccine protect against the flu?**

- The seasonal flu vaccine contains three strains of flu virus. The vaccine is updated yearly with the most current circulating strains.
- This year’s seasonal flu vaccine provides protection against the 2009 pandemic H1N1 flu virus, in addition to 2 other flu strains.
- With a good match between the strains in the vaccine and those in circulation, the vaccine is 70% to 90% effective in preventing the flu in healthy children and adults and may protect them for up to one year.
- Even if you do get the flu, vaccinated people usually have milder symptoms.
- It takes about 2 weeks after the vaccination to develop protection against the flu.

## When should the seasonal flu vaccine be given?

- Vaccination is needed every year and is recommended *before* flu reaches the community, but can be given even after there is flu activity. It is also recommended for those travelling to destinations where seasonal flu is likely to be circulating.
- Children under 9 years old require two doses of vaccine given at least four weeks apart if they are receiving seasonal influenza vaccine for the first time. They are then recommended to receive one dose per season in the following years.

## Is the seasonal flu vaccine safe? Are there any side effects?

- Yes, the vaccine is very safe. The benefits of being vaccinated far outweigh the risks.
- The vaccine **cannot** give you influenza because it does not contain ‘live’ virus.
- Mild pain, redness and swelling are common at the site where the needle was given.
- Some individuals may get a mild fever and/or muscle aches within 6 to 12 hours after getting vaccinated. These symptoms may last about 1 to 2 days.
- If you develop red eyes and any respiratory symptom (e.g., cough, wheeze, difficulty breathing, hoarseness, sore throat) with or without facial swelling within 24 hours after receiving your flu vaccination, **please report this to your doctor and Niagara Region Public Health.**
- Contact your doctor or go to the nearest emergency room immediately if you experience any of these other symptoms:
  - high fever (40°C or 104°F)
  - lasting or worsening weakness
  - hives
  - dizziness
  - swelling of the lips, tongue, or face
  - convulsions
  - trouble breathing
  - other serious problems

## Who should NOT get the vaccine?

- Infants younger than 6 months of age.
- Individuals with a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the flu vaccine or to any of the vaccine components.
- Individuals with a severe allergic reaction to eggs (manifested as hives, swelling of the mouth and throat, difficulty in breathing or shock).
- Individuals with an infection or high fever (vaccination should be delayed until feeling better).
- Individuals with an active neurological disorder (e.g., multiple sclerosis, Guillian-Barre Syndrome, epilepsy). Immunization can be considered once disease process has stabilized.
- Individuals planning to donate blood within 48 hours after vaccination.

Sources:

Canadian Immunization Guide, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, 2006.

National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), Statement on Seasonal Trivalent Inactivated Influenza Vaccine for 2010-2011, August 2010.

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For more information, please contact:  
Niagara Region Public Health, Vaccine Preventable Disease Program  
905-688-8248 or 1-888-505-6074 ext. 7425  
[www.niagararegion.ca](http://www.niagararegion.ca)