

FACT SHEET

THE FLU SHOT AND CHILDREN

What is the flu?



Influenza (or “flu”) is a respiratory illness that spreads easily and is caused by influenza viruses. Anyone can get the flu. Many people are ill with the flu for several days, but some people may get much sicker and need hospital care. The flu leads to thousands of deaths each year, mostly among the elderly, but young children are

also at risk. In Canada, the flu season usually runs from November to April.

Common symptoms of influenza include:

- cough
- sore throat
- chills
- headaches
- fever
- runny nose
- fatigue
- muscle aches.

It does not normally cause children to throw up or have diarrhea.

Why should my child get a flu shot?

The flu virus spreads quickly and easily. Children are the main spreaders of the virus, both at school and at home. Children can catch the flu easily just by touching items like toys or eating utensils that may have been used by someone with the flu. In general, infection rates are higher in children than in adults.

A flu shot can prevent your children from getting the flu, and stop it from spreading to family, friends, classmates and those at risk of serious complications.



Who should get a flu shot?

- All children over 6 months of age
- Children 6 months to 23 months old. They can be severely affected by the flu and are at higher risk of being admitted to the hospital because of flu symptoms
- Children with heart and lung diseases
- Children with any other long-term health conditions
- Children with conditions treated for long periods with acetylsalicylic acid (e.g. Aspirin).

CHILDREN UNDER 9 YEARS OF AGE

Children under 9 who have never received a flu shot require two flu shots at least one month apart. Evidence shows that following this recommendation will provide your child with better long-term protection.

How effective is the flu shot?

There is a new flu vaccine every year because influenza viruses change often. A flu shot is about 70-90% effective in preventing illness in healthy children. Protection develops about two weeks after getting the shot and may last up to a year. Some people who get the flu shot may still get the flu, but it will usually be a milder case than if they had chosen not to be vaccinated.

Who should not get the flu shot?

- Children who had a previous anaphylactic reaction to the flu shot
- Children with an active neurologic disorder should talk to their doctor about delaying their flu shot
- Children who have a fever the day of the clinic should wait until they feel better to receive the vaccine
- Children with a known allergy to Thimerosal or eggs should not get a flu shot



What are the risks from the flu shot?

The flu vaccine is very safe. The most common side effects from the flu shot include soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given. Fever or muscle aches can occur but are less common. If these problems occur, they usually begin soon after the shot and last one to two days. More severe reactions rarely take place. Anyone experiencing trouble breathing, swelling of the mouth and throat, hives, difficulty swallowing or any other unusual symptoms should see their family doctor and report it to the health unit.

The viruses in the vaccine have been killed, so children cannot get the flu from the flu shot.

Where can I learn more?

Call your doctor or a public health nurse at the Perth District Health Unit at 519-271-7600 ext 267. Listowel area residents call 1-877-271-7348 ext 267. Or visit our Web site at www.pdhu.on.ca.

