

## **Preparing for your Influenza Vaccine**

### **What is influenza?**

Influenza (“the flu”) is an infection of the respiratory tract that is caused by a virus. It is spread through coughing, sneezing, shaking hands or by touching contaminated objects. Symptoms include sudden high fever, cough, headache, muscle aches, loss of appetite and fatigue. Influenza season in Canada usually lasts from November to April.

### **Why get the influenza vaccine?**

It can not only prevent you from getting ill, but also from spreading influenza to those who may be at risk of more serious complications, such as pneumonia. Getting an influenza vaccine every year is an important part of your defense against influenza because the type of virus changes from year to year.

### **Who should get it and who should not get it?**

It is recommended that everyone 6 months of age and older get the influenza vaccine. You should speak with your Pharmacist or doctor first if you have a history of a severe allergic reaction to influenza vaccine or a component of the vaccine, or a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome because the influenza vaccine may **not** be appropriate for you. If you are ill with a fever, the Pharmacist may ask you to come back for your influenza vaccine when you are better. Inform the Pharmacist if you have a severe egg allergy or any other allergies.

### **What can I expect from the Flu Shot or the FluMist Inhalation?**

The injection is usually given in the arm, so the Pharmacist will require access to your upper arm. The FluMist is a nasal spray.

The influenza vaccine does not cause influenza. The most common side effect for the flu shot is soreness at the site of the injection. For FluMist, the most common side effects are runny nose and nasal congestion.

After flu vaccination some people may also develop a fever, muscle pain, and general flu like symptoms such as: tiredness/weakness, headache, cough/sore throat. These side effects are generally mild and only last a few days. The Pharmacist will ask you to wait at the pharmacy for at least 15 minutes after your vaccination to monitor for any reaction to the vaccine.

## What should I do if I experience a side effect or reaction from the flu vaccine injection?

For soreness, ask the Pharmacist if an over-the-counter pain medication may be appropriate for you, or apply a cold cloth to the area. If you experience a less common reaction such as red eyes, mild coughing or wheezing, and swelling of the face (called oculorespiratory syndrome) see your doctor if these symptoms do not go away. Guillain-Barré syndrome is rare and causes symptoms such as muscle weakness, tingling and numbness in the legs and feet or loss of movement. If you are concerned about your symptoms, see your doctor.

## FluMist Vaccine

### What is the FluMist vaccine?

The FluMist Quadrivalent is a needle-free influenza vaccine that you get through a nasal spray. The FluMist vaccine is a fine mist that gets sprayed into your nose and protects you from four strains of influenza. The FluMist vaccine can protect adults and children aged 2-59 years against influenza.

### How does the FluMist vaccine work?

Instead of being given as an injection, the FluMist vaccine is a nasal spray and consists of a fine mist that gets sprayed into your nose to prompt an immune response. The Pharmacist will ask you to wait at the pharmacy for at least 15 minutes after your vaccination.

### What's the difference between the regular flu shot and FluMist?

The FluMist is a live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) which means that it contains a weakened, but alive, form of the influenza virus. This is different from other types of flu shots that are available which contain an inactivated form of the flu virus. Other types of flu shots are given to you as an injection, whereas the FluMist vaccine is a nasal spray that gets sprayed into your nose.

### Do I need to inhale when getting FluMist?

No. The mist that's sprayed into your nose is enough for FluMist to start working. You don't need to inhale or sniff when getting the FluMist vaccine.

### Who should NOT get the FluMist vaccine?

People who should **not** get the FluMist vaccine include:

- Children younger than 2 years old
- Adults older than 59 years old

- People who have a history of hypersensitivity, especially anaphylactic reactions to eggs, egg proteins, gentamicin, gelatin or arginine or with a history of hypersensitivity to previous influenza vaccinations
- People under the age of 18 taking Aspirin<sup>(R)</sup> or medications containing Aspirin<sup>(R)</sup>
- People with severe asthma or active wheezing
- Are pregnant or intend to become pregnant
- Anyone with nasal congestion should wait until the congestion clears before getting the FluMist vaccine, or consider an influenza vaccine by intramuscular injection
- Anyone with a moderate to severe illness, with or without a fever, should wait until their symptoms go away before getting the FluMist vaccine
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**It may be inappropriate to receive the FluMist Vaccine if the Patient:**

- Has had Guillain-Barre syndrome within 6 weeks of a previous influenza immunization
- Is immunosuppressed due to disease or drug treatment or associated with people who are immunosuppressed