

KEY MESSAGES FOR STAKEHOLDERS– INFLUENZA PROGRAM 2017-18

Q & A: GENERAL FLU

Q: What is the flu?

The flu is caused by the influenza virus and is characterized by the sudden onset of fever, muscle pain, sore throat, and non-productive cough. Unlike other common respiratory illnesses, influenza can cause severe symptoms lasting several days. It can also lead to complications such as pneumonia or worsening of chronic disease.

Q: How is the flu spread?

Influenza can spread from person to person by direct contact. Transmission predominates among crowded populations in enclosed spaces such as long-term care facilities, schools etc. The incubation period for influenza is usually one to three days and individuals are infectious from one day before symptom onset up to seven days afterwards. It's important to:

- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after a sneeze or cough. When soap and water are not handy, alcohol-based hand sanitizers are an acceptable alternative.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes.
- Limit touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Do not share drinking glasses, eating utensils, water bottles, mouth guards, or cosmetics.

Q: Where can I find flu awareness and immunization promotion resources?

- [Nova Scotia's Department of Health and Wellness](#)
- [Government of Canada : Flu Awareness Resources](#)
- [The National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\): Canadian Immunization Guide Chapter on Influenza and Statement on Seasonal Influenza Vaccine for 2017–2018](#)
- [Immunize Canada](#)
- [The World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

Q & A: SEVERE RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES

Q: Will H1N1 and H7N9 be among the flu strains included in the seasonal flu vaccine?

H1N1 is included. There is no vaccination for H7N9, nor is there an imminent threat of this strain in Nova Scotia or Canada.

Q: Should we be concerned about severe respiratory illnesses in other parts of the world (H7N9 and MERS CoV) affecting Nova Scotians?

We've been monitoring these situations, in partnership with federal, provincial and territorial partners. Should a patient in Nova Scotia present with symptoms of these illness, we have a protocol in place that's based on national and international standards and has been shared with health care providers across the province.

Q & A: 2016-17 FLU SEASON REVIEW

Q: How many reported flu cases did Nova Scotia have last season?

There were 442 confirmed influenza cases during the 2016-17 season. This is an increase compared to the 2015-16 season, during which 308 positive influenza cases were reported. The predominant strain circulating in Nova Scotia last season was Influenza A (92.5% of all laboratory-confirmed cases).

Q: Which age groups were most at risk for influenza last season?

The rate of influenza cases was highest among those 65 years of age and older (181.5/100 000 population) and the 0-4 age group (57.0/100 000 population).

Q: What was the severity of last season's flu season?

There were 247 hospitalized cases of influenza, 24 ICU admissions and 27 influenza related deaths reported in 2016-17. Increases in influenza related hospitalizations and deaths were seen compared to the 2015-16 season.

Q: How many Nova Scotians received an influenza immunization last season?

37.1% of the Nova Scotia population received the influenza vaccine for the 2016-17 season, compared to 37.8% for 2015-16. Influenza vaccine coverage has been steadily decreasing since 2013.

Q & A: IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM

Q: Who should get a flu immunization?

All Nova Scotians are encouraged to get the influenza vaccine, but especially people at high risk of complications, including the elderly, children six months to 5 years, indigenous peoples, pregnant women, anyone with chronic medical conditions such as heart disease, asthma, and diabetes, and those who live with, or care for, individuals in the high-risk groups.

Q: Is Nova Scotia using the quadrivalent vaccine this year?

Yes, Nova Scotia is continuing to publicly fund the quadrivalent inactivated vaccine (QIV) in accordance with the recommendation from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). This vaccine contains two Influenza A strains and two Influenza B strains.

Q: Is the flu immunization still free for the public?

Yes, the inactivated publicly funded influenza vaccine is available free of charge to all Nova Scotians ages 6 months and older and we encourage everyone to get a flu immunization.

Q: Why should I get a flu immunization?

The flu sends thousands of Nova Scotians to doctors, clinics and emergency departments every year, can cause increased hospitalizations and even death. Immunization is the single most effective way to prevent the flu. It helps Nova Scotians avoid getting the flu themselves, and avoid spreading it to family, friends, co-workers and people in their care, such as children in child care facilities and those in health and long-term care facilities.

Q: Where can I get a flu immunization?

Influenza vaccine is available from your family doctor, family practice nurse or nurse practitioner, from most pharmacies across the province, some workplaces and in some areas of the province through clinics offered by Public Health.

Q: Why do I need to get an immunization every year?

There are many different kinds of flu. Each year, the vaccine is changed to protect against the types of flu that are expected that year.

Q: How soon following immunization does protection develop?

Protection from the vaccine generally begins 10 to 14 days after immunization and may last 6 months or longer.

Q: What are the adverse reactions to this vaccine?

One third of those vaccinated report soreness at the injection site for up to two days. Flu-like symptoms (fever, sore muscles, and tiredness) may occur within 6 to 12 hours after vaccination and last 1 to 2 days, especially in those receiving the vaccine for the first time. Mild, local reactions (soreness at the site of injection or fever) occur in less than 12% of young children.

Anaphylactic reactions occur rarely.

Q: What are the risks and/or precautions related to this vaccine?

Influenza vaccine should not be given to people who have had an allergic reaction to a previous dose or any component of the vaccine. Individuals with an egg allergy may receive the influenza vaccine.

Q: Some people say vaccines don't work, or do more harm than good. So why should Nova Scotians get a flu immunization?

There is a lot of misinformation about vaccinations, and about other ways to avoid the flu. However, research shows that vaccination is a safe, simple and effective way to prevent you from getting the flu, and from passing it on to other people. We recommend it for all Nova Scotians aged 6 months and older.

Q: Can anyone get a flu immunization from a pharmacist?

Pharmacists who've been trained have the authority to give the immunization to anyone age 5 or older.

Q: Can I just walk into a pharmacy and get a flu immunization?

Each pharmacy will determine how it offers the flu immunization. Many will set up clinics or take appointments during certain hours.