

## INFLUENZA FACT SHEET

### GETTING YOUR FLU SHOT.....WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

#### *What is the Flu? (Influenza)*

- The flu is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by the influenza virus. It is much worse than a cold.
- It can leave you bedridden for 5 to 10 days.
- With the flu you get a high fever, headache, loss of appetite, muscle aches, weakness, chills, dry cough, sore throat, nasal congestion and sneezing.

#### *How is the flu spread?*

- It is very easy to catch and to spread the flu to others, mainly by coughing and sneezing.
- The virus can also live up to 48 hours on surfaces like a telephone, doorknobs, kitchen countertops and toys.
- 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.

#### *When should you get the flu vaccine?*

- You must get a flu vaccination **every year** in order to get protected against the virus strains that are expected to be circulating during the current flu season.
- Flu season is usually from October to April.
- Children less than 9 years old need two vaccinations, given at least one month apart, the first time they receive the flu vaccine.
- It takes about 2 weeks for the vaccine to provide the body with protection against the virus.

#### *How effective is the vaccine?*

- With a good match to circulating flu strains, the flu vaccine has been shown to prevent illness in approximately 70 to 90% of children and adults
- Sometimes with elderly persons or persons with a weakened immune system, the level and length of time of vaccine protection is not quite as good as with healthy children or younger adults but it still helps to prevent pneumonia or other serious medical complications, hospital admission and even death.
- Even if you do get the flu, vaccinated people usually have milder symptoms.
- Getting the flu vaccine **cannot** give you the flu because it is made from “killed viruses”.

#### *Why should you get the flu vaccine?*

- The flu can lower your body’s ability to fight off other infections, which can lead to pneumonia or bronchitis or other serious complications. Older persons and children 6 to 23 months of age are at higher risk for complications when they get sick with the flu, compared with healthy older children and adults.
- To avoid losing time from your job, school, volunteer work and social activities.
- To avoid spreading the flu to others.
- To help lessen the burden on the health care system by reducing visits to doctors’ offices, clinics and hospitals.
- For health care workers, it is important to be vaccinated in order that you don’t spread the virus to patients who already have other health problems.

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

- Children or adults with underlying medical conditions of the heart, lungs or kidneys, diabetes, blood disorders (e.g. anemia or sickle cell disease) or conditions/treatments that weaken the immune system (e.g. cancer patients receiving chemotherapy)
- Children up to the age of 18 years receiving ASA for long periods
- People of any age who are residents of long term care facilities
- People 65 years of age or older
- Healthy children 6 to 23 months
- Health care and other care providers in facilities and community settings who are at risk of spreading influenza to those they are caring for that are considered high risk of influenza complications
- Household contacts of adults with high risk medical conditions
- Household contacts and those providing regular child care to children 0 to 23 months
- Pregnant or breastfeeding women, especially women who are expected to deliver their baby during flu season
- Those who live and provide services within closed settings (e.g. Crews on ships and school dorms)
- People who provide essential community services
- People in direct contact with avian-influenza infected poultry during culling season
- Healthy persons aged 2 to 64 years old

### ***Who should NOT get the vaccine?***

- Infants less than 6 months of age
- Anyone who has a serious allergy (manifested as hives, swelling of the mouth and throat, difficulty breathing, low blood pressure and shock) to eggs, thimerosal, neomycin and formaldehyde
- Anyone with a serious acute febrile illness should not be vaccinated until symptoms improve
- Persons with active neurological disorders (e.g. Guillan Barre Syndrome, Multiple Sclerosis) need to be seen by their physician
- Persons who have a history of a serious reaction to the flu vaccine

### ***Are there side effects from the vaccine?***

- The flu vaccine is very safe, but like any other medication, side effects can occur.
- Soreness, redness, slight swelling or bruising where the vaccine was given is common, lasting up to 2 days, but should not interfere with normal activities.
- Mild fever, fatigue and muscle aches may occur within 6 to 12 hours after the vaccine is given, especially if this is the first time you have received the vaccine. These symptoms should disappear within 1 to 2 days.
- If you develop red eyes or respiratory problems within 24 hours after receiving your flu vaccination, please report this to your doctor and the Public Health Department.

**Contact your family doctor or go to the nearest emergency room immediately if you experience any of these other symptoms.**

- **High fever**
- **Hives**
- **Swelling of the lips, tongue or face**
- **Difficulty breathing/swallowing**
- **Lasting or worsening weakness/dizziness**
- **Convulsions**

For more information about the flu vaccine, please contact

Niagara Region Public Health at (905) 688-8248 ext. 7443 or 1-888-505-6074