

201 Brownlow Avenue
Unit #4
Dartmouth, NS B3B 1W2

Tel # (902) 481-5800
Fax # (902) 481-5802/5803

Influenza or “flu” is an acute, viral illness characterized by sudden onset of fever, sore muscles, runny nose, sore throat and dry cough.

During a typical influenza season in Nova Scotia, over 21,000 physician visits, 2,500 hospitalizations and 450 deaths are attributed to the flu.

Immunization against influenza is the best way to prevent and control the spread of this highly contagious illness. To reduce the complications and deaths associated with influenza, it is recommended that the following high risk individuals be immunized:

- people 65 years of age or over
- people who live in long-term care and other chronic care facilities
- adults and children with chronic lung or heart diseases, diabetes, cancer, kidney disease, HIV, immune deficiency, anemia
- children and adolescents treated for long periods of time with acetylsalicylic acid
- household contacts of the above groups
- children age 6 to 23 months of age
- health care workers (including volunteers in hospitals, long term care facilities and home care organizations)

Vaccination is recommended for pregnant women in the high risk groups noted above. The vaccine is considered safe for pregnant women regardless of their stage of pregnancy as well as for breastfeeding mothers.

The only people who should not receive influenza vaccine are people who have severe or anaphylactic allergies to eggs or who have had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of influenza vaccine.

The flu vaccine is extremely safe. It **cannot** give you the flu because the vaccine does not contain live virus.

Each year the flu vaccine changes to protect against the current types of influenza viruses that are circulating. This is why annual immunization is necessary.

In an effort to help keep our communities healthy and further reduce the spread of influenza remember.....

- Yearly immunization with the flu vaccine can prevent influenza and its complications. It can save your life or the life of a family member, friend or patient/client.
- The flu vaccine is free of charge to individuals in the high risk groups as outlined.
- October to November is the best time of year to receive your flu vaccine.
- **Be wise.....immunize against influenza.**

Shirley Williams, LPN, Public Health Services, Capital Health
Elaine Holmes, RN, Public Health Services, Capital Health

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