Influenza is a very contagious infection that prevails in Quebec in winter, from December to April, and can cause important epidemics.

Influenza spreads as infected people cough, sneeze or contaminate different objects such as counters, phones or any other objects that will not be disinfected before being reutilized. People often confuse the flu with cold. Although the flu seems common, it may bring more important symptoms such as fever, cough, muscular aches or other discomfort that may last for 5 to 10 days. Seasonal flu sometimes leads to pneumonia with severe consequences including death in people with chronic diseases. In Québec, there are annually 1300 to 1600 deaths related to complications of seasonal influenza. The best protection against seasonal flu is vaccination. Over 70% of vaccinated individuals in good health will not contract seasonal flu while others will have reduced symptoms.

Contrary to popular belief, the vaccine against influenza is made of totally inactivated viral particles that cannot cause flu. Under the coordination of the World Health Organization, laboratories all around the world continuously isolate and identify the different strains of influenza virus most likely to cause flu in the following year. The composition of the vaccine is therefore different from one year to the other and consequently one needs to get vaccinated each year to insure proper protection.

**Good reasons to get vaccinated**

1. Why would you risk many days of discomfort, days of bed rest and loss of precious time when you are already busy managing your time for family, work, and friends?

2. Even if you are in good health and do not have flu, the virus can use you as a mode of transmission.

3. You can avoid transmitting the virus to your family, elderly people and coworkers.

4. If you are likely to meet people who have influenza at work, you will be protected against it.

5. No totally efficient treatment for this virus is currently available.
IMPORTANT NOTICE

You should not receive the seasonal influenza vaccine if:

- You have a severe allergy to eggs or egg products.
- You have a severe allergy to thimerosal, a preservative agent used in many pharmaceutical preparations including some vaccines.
- You have a severe allergy to Neomycin (antibacterial agent).
- You have fever or an acute disease with high fever.
- You have developed the Guillain-Barre Syndrome in the 6 weeks following your last anti-influenza vaccination.

You can receive the vaccine even if:

- You take antibiotics.
- You are pregnant.
- You recently received another vaccine.
- You have a cold.

Potential risks and common side effects

After vaccination, none or very little side effects are felt by the vast majority of the population with typically only minor pain at the vaccine injection site, discomfort, muscular aches or (more rarely) fever. These symptoms typically last 24 to 48 hours and can be alleviated with Acetaminophen.

Cases of the Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) have been reported spontaneously after administration of the anti-influenza vaccine. However, it was not possible to establish a causal relationship to vaccine exposure. As for all pharmaceutical preparations, there is always a very small possibility of developing an allergy or serious intolerance reaction.

If you have a high fever or unusual side effects lasting more than 48 hours, consult your physician and report it to Biron - Laboratoire Médical at 514 866-5005, extension 2863.

Vaccination remains the best weapon against seasonal influenza infection.

Raymond Lepage, Ph.D., FCACB
Scientific Director