Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention.¹ Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause disease.

What is seasonal influenza?
Seasonal influenza (the flu) is a respiratory infection caused by a virus that can seem similar to the common cold, but the signs and symptoms of the flu are usually more severe. Sudden high fever, body aches, extreme tiredness and dry cough are more common with the flu than the common cold. Other common symptoms include headache, chills, loss of appetite and sore throat. Nausea and upset stomach may also occur, especially in young children. The flu can lead to more serious problems like pneumonia and bacterial infections, sometimes resulting in hospitalization.

How is the flu spread?
The flu can spread easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing or sharing food or drinks. You can also get the flu by touching objects contaminated with flu virus and then touching your mouth, eyes or nose. For this reason, it’s important to cover your nose and mouth with your forearm when you cough or sneeze and wash your hands often with soap and water (or hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable), especially after coughing and sneezing.

What can be done to fight the flu?
There are steps you can take to minimize the risks of getting the flu including covering coughs and sneezes; washing your hands regularly; and getting immunized with a flu vaccine every fall.

What do I do if I, or my child(ren), have the flu?
If you or your child(ren) are sick, you should stay home to avoid infecting other people. If you or your child(ren) get worse or have trouble breathing, you should visit a health care provider.

What is H1N1 flu?
A new strain of H1N1 influenza emerged in 2009. As it was a new strain of flu virus, it caused serious illness in many individuals. This is known as a pandemic. The H1N1 virus is now considered to be one of the most common circulating strains in a normal flu season. The annual flu vaccine protects against H1N1.

What is the flu vaccine?
There are many different strains of flu virus that circulate each year. The flu vaccine does not protect against all of them. Every year, scientists monitor the global spread of flu and decide which four flu strains will likely cause the most illness during the flu season. Those four strains are then put into the flu vaccine for that year so each year, the vaccine is different. For this reason and because protection provided by the vaccine decreases over time, it’s important to get the flu vaccine every fall.

The flu vaccine cannot offer protection against other viruses or bacteria that cause the common cold or stomach flu.

When should people get immunized?
The sooner you or your child(ren) get immunized, the better because the flu season in Manitoba generally begins in late fall and lasts into spring. Also, the flu vaccine takes about two weeks to start working. You don’t want to wait until people around you or your child(ren) start getting sick before immunizing yourself or your child(ren). For these reasons, it’s recommended people get immunized early fall.

Who should get the flu vaccine?
An annual flu vaccine is available free-of-charge to all Manitobans six months of age and older as part of Manitoba’s routine immunization schedule. Getting immunized against the flu every year is especially important for Manitobans who are at increased risk of

¹ Public Health Agency of Canada
serious illness from the flu, their caregivers and close contacts. However, healthy individuals also benefit from the flu vaccine and the more people that are immunized, the better because some people with certain medical conditions (ex: people undergoing cancer treatment) as well as newborn infants are unable to get immunized and they rely on others around them to be immunized.

What if I, or my child(ren), have an allergy to eggs?
All flu vaccines available in Canada are manufactured by a process involving chicken eggs, which may result in the flu vaccine containing trace amounts of egg protein. Public health officials have reviewed the data and determined that it is safe for egg allergic individuals to be immunized against flu, with any of the flu vaccines available in Manitoba and Canada (needle or nasal spray).

Is mercury in the flu vaccine bad?
Some flu vaccines contain minute quantities of thimerosal (mercury), which is used as a preservative to keep the vaccine sterile. The minute amount of thimerosal in a vaccine is proven to be safe and countless scientific studies have proven that there is no association between childhood vaccination with thimerosal-containing vaccines and neurodevelopmental conditions (ex: autism). If this is of concern, some flu vaccines including the nasal spray are thimerosal-free.

Where can someone get the flu vaccine?
To find out the best time and place as well as check for flu vaccine availability, contact your health care provider at your local public health office, nursing station, doctor’s office, pharmacy, QuickCare Clinic or ACCESS Centre.

For more information on the flu and the flu vaccine:
Talk to a health care provider.
Call Health Links–Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.

Or visit:
Manitoba’s Seasonal Influenza Program: www.manitoba.ca/health/flu/