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## **Influenza immunization campaign targets more Albertans**

*Children under five, adults over 50 all now eligible for free vaccination*

**Edmonton, Canada** – Alberta Health and Wellness has expanded the population groups eligible for publicly-funded immunization against influenza. Children aged two-four years and adults aged 50-64 years have been added to the list identified by this year's Alberta Health Services campaign.

"It's important for people to realize how serious influenza is, and how the complications of influenza can have long-reaching consequences," says Ken Hughes, Chair, Alberta Health Services Board. "Influenza isn't just a cold or the sniffles – it's a serious condition that affects thousands of Albertans every year; that's why our immunization campaign is so important."

While up to 25 per cent of the general population is at risk of being infected with influenza each year, some people are at higher risk of developing complications related to it. High-risk groups include infants and children up to two years of age, pregnant women, people aged 65 and over, and people who have certain medical conditions such as chronic respiratory disease, heart or kidney disease, diabetes or a depressed immune system because of cancer, HIV infection, or some other cause. Alberta Health Services offers influenza immunization free of charge for these groups and for caregivers who live with them.

"Immunization will always be our best defense against influenza, which is why we've expanded the number of groups eligible for immunization," says Dr. Gerry Predy, Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health for Alberta. "The more high-risk groups that are immunized will result in less transmission of the virus to those populations at high risk of influenza-related complications."

These two new age groups are not high-risk populations for complications, but they are often in contact with vulnerable populations that are. However, all populations can benefit from receiving the immunization, so Alberta Health Services is making the immunization available via local public health centres for a fee of \$25 for those who don't qualify for free campaign.

"The influenza immunization must be given annually to maximize the benefits," says Predy, who notes the three influenza strains being protected against this year are new strains to North America. "These new strains make it all the more important to undergo an annual vaccination as protection from a previous year's vaccination may not be effective this year. Watch your local newspaper for upcoming influenza clinic dates and times in your area."

To learn more about influenza, who qualifies for free immunization, or more information about immunization clinics, please visit our website at [www.albertahealthservices.ca/influenza](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/influenza), or call Health Link Alberta toll-free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

Alberta Health Services is the provincial authority responsible for planning and delivering accessible and sustainable patient-focused health services to more than 3.5 million Albertans.

### **The following people/populations qualify to receive free influenza vaccine through Alberta Health Services immunization campaign:**

- People of any age living in a nursing home, lodge or chronic care facility
- People 50 years of age and older
- Children 6-59 months (under five years of age)

- Family members and regular caregivers of children under 24 months
- Adults and children with chronic conditions including heart conditions, diabetes, asthma, cancer, etc
- People who are HIV positive
- Pregnant women
- Household members and caregivers of children less than 24 month of age, persons 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, persons with chronic health conditions and persons living in a chronically disadvantaged situation
- Health care workers and other personnel in contact with those at high risk

**For those who don't qualify for free influenza vaccine, immunization will be available for a fee of \$25.**