

RECOMMENDATIONS ON INFLUENZA VACCINATION DURING THE 2018–2019 WINTER SEASON

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WHO Regional Office for Europe recommendations on influenza vaccination during the 2018–2019 season

Influenza is an infectious disease that spreads mainly from person to person by droplets through coughing, sneezing or talking when people are in close contact. Influenza symptoms begin suddenly and can last from a few days to up to 2 weeks. Common symptoms include fever, cough, body aches and headache. While influenza infection is usually mild and uncomplicated, it may occasionally cause severe disease, particularly among the elderly, pregnant women, young children, and persons with underlying medical conditions. Seasonal influenza vaccination is safe and the most effective means of preventing infection and severe outcomes caused by influenza viruses.

RECOMMENDED TARGET GROUPS FOR INFLUENZA VACCINATION

Vaccination can benefit persons of all ages but is especially important for people at higher risk of serious influenza complications. Specific population groups may be targeted for vaccination depending on the objectives of the national vaccination programme, documented vaccine effectiveness, access to vaccine, and the ability to implement vaccination campaigns in the target groups.

The priority groups for influenza immunization are drawn from the 2012 WHO position paper on influenza vaccines¹ and include:

- pregnant women;
- individuals with chronic heart or lung diseases, metabolic or renal disease, chronic liver disease, chronic neurological conditions or immunodeficiencies;
- elderly persons over a nationally defined age limit, irrespective of other risk factors;
- residents of long-term care facilities for older persons and the disabled;
- children aged 6–59 months;
- health care workers including those who work in facilities that care for the elderly or persons with disabilities.

Additional information

Information sheets on reaction rates of seasonal influenza vaccines (available in English and Russian) http://www.who.int/vaccine_safety/initiative/tools/vaccinfosheets/en/

COMPOSITION OF INFLUENZA VACCINES FOR 2018–2019

Due to the influenza virus' continuous genetic and antigenic changes, WHO updates its recommendations for the composition of the vaccine twice a year for the northern and southern hemisphere, respectively. The viruses included in the vaccine are those predicted to be the most common in the forthcoming season. Because the composition of the vaccine is updated regularly to produce the best protection, vaccination against influenza is recommended every year before the season begins. As it takes approximately 6–8 months to produce influenza vaccines,

¹ Seasonal influenza vaccine, Weekly Epidemiological Record: 2012 (21); 87, 201–16 (www.who.int/wer/2012/wer8721.pdf)

recommendations for the vaccine composition for the northern hemisphere are published by WHO in February every year.

During the upcoming 2018–2019 influenza season, WHO recommends that *trivalent* seasonal influenza vaccines for use in the northern hemisphere contain²:

- an A/Michigan/45/2015 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Singapore/INFIMH-16-0019/2016 (H3N2)-like virus; and
- a B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus (B/Victoria/2/87 lineage)

It is recommended that *quadrivalent* vaccines include a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (B/Yamagata/16/88 lineage) in addition to the three viruses above.

This year's northern hemisphere vaccine composition represents two changes compared with the vaccine used for the 2017–2018 season with the influenza B/Victoria lineage virus component and the A(H3N2) virus component being updated. The update is as follows:

- Replacement of the A/Hong Kong/4801/2014 (H3N2)-like virus with an A/Singapore/INFIMH-16-0019/2016 (H3N2)-like virus.
- Replacement of the B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus with a B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus.

WHO is continuously monitoring influenza virus circulation globally and will provide updated recommendations as needed.

² Recommended composition of influenza virus vaccines for use in the 2018–2019 northern hemisphere influenza season; http://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/recommendations/2018_19_north/en/

The WHO Regional Office for Europe

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