



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

Avian Influenza Vaccine

What is the avian influenza vaccine?

The avian influenza vaccine (Arepanrix™ H5N1) protects against infection from the virus that causes avian influenza (bird flu). The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

Who should get the vaccine?

The vaccine is free for people at increased risk of being repeatedly exposed to the avian influenza virus. This includes:

- Lab workers who routinely handle samples that likely contain live avian influenza virus or who culture avian influenza virus
- Veterinary staff examining dead animals that may be infected
- People working in diagnostic laboratories in contact with large numbers of infected carcasses
- People involved in the management of infected animals including animal culling, disposal or building cleaning and disinfection
- People working in close contact with wild birds or in/around waterfowl habitats such as:
 - Wildlife or animal control officers
 - Wildlife rehabilitation workers
 - Wildlife researchers
 - Hunters and trappers
 - People working on environmental impact assessments and surveys
 - People and contractors working on waterborne pathogens

The vaccine is not being offered more widely as the risk to most people from avian influenza is extremely low.

How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine is given as a series of 2 doses, at least 3 weeks apart. However, protection can likely be enhanced if it is offered 8 weeks apart.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

What are the benefits of the vaccine?

The vaccine can help protect you from getting avian influenza, a serious and sometimes fatal disease. The vaccine is known to generate a strong immune response (e.g., producing antibodies) to avian influenza, although its clinical effectiveness is not yet known as the vaccine has not been widely used. The vaccine can prevent avian influenza or make the illness less severe. When you get immunized you help protect others as well.

What are the possible reactions after the vaccine?

The vaccine is very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get avian influenza. The vaccine cannot give you avian influenza.

Common reactions to the vaccine may include soreness, redness, and swelling where the vaccine was given. Other reactions include tiredness, headache, fever, chills, sweating, muscle or joint soreness, nausea, diarrhea, and loss of appetite.

If you have concerns about any symptoms you develop after receiving the vaccine speak with your health care provider or call 8-1-1 for advice.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye Syndrome.

For information on Reye Syndrome, see [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye Syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. There is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This happens in less than 1 in a million people who get the vaccine.

Symptoms may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this reaction occurs, your health care provider is prepared to treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

After receiving the avian influenza vaccine, you might be contacted to participate in a study monitoring the safety of the vaccine. To learn more about the CANVAS study, please visit <https://canvas-network.ca/>.

Who should not get the vaccine?

Speak with your health care provider if you:

- Had a life-threatening allergic reaction to a previous dose of any influenza vaccine or to any part of the avian influenza vaccine (people with egg allergies can be safely immunized)
- Developed Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) within 8 weeks of getting any influenza vaccine without another cause being identified

GBS is a rare condition that can result in weakness and paralysis of the body's muscles. It most commonly occurs after infections. In rare cases GBS can occur after some vaccines.

There is no need to delay getting immunized because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you have concerns speak with your health care provider.

Are there other considerations to getting the vaccine?

Speak with your health care provider if you

received or plan to receive another vaccine within 6 weeks of getting any avian influenza vaccine.

If you received the seasonal influenza vaccine it will not protect you from avian influenza. However, the seasonal influenza vaccine is still important to receive.

If you receive the avian influenza vaccine you should still take precautions including using personal protective equipment if you are involved in activities that put you at risk of exposure to avian influenza virus.

What is avian influenza?

Avian influenza is a virus that usually infects birds and other mammals. However, it can also infect animals and people. The risk of getting avian influenza is extremely low for most people.

You can become infected with avian influenza by exposure to infected birds, animals or their environments.

People with avian influenza may have a mild illness or a more serious respiratory illness while others may not have any symptoms. Symptoms of avian influenza include:

- Fever
- Conjunctivitis (red and itchy eyes)
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Sore throat
- Sore muscles or joints
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea
- Shortness of breath

People with avian influenza almost never spread the virus to others.

For more information about avian influenza please visit: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/diseases-conditions/avian-influenza>.