

## Canadian Flu Vaccine May Be Making Some People Ill

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Officials in British Columbia and Quebec have launched an investigation to determine why hundreds of people in three Canadian provinces have gotten sick following their flu vaccinations. According to Health Canada, the country's national health service, more than 1,100 adverse reactions have been reported in people given Flurival, a vaccine made by BioChem Pharma of Quebec.

Flurival is one two flu vaccines administered in Canada. Last year, Flurival was given to the residents of British Columbia, Quebec and the Yukon. According to statistics from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, an average of 10 people have allergic reactions to the flu vaccine each year. In the last three months of 2000, however, 1,113 reactions were reported in conjunction with Flurival vaccinations.

The adverse reactions typically occur red four to six hours after a person was vaccinated. Symptoms included red eyes, swollen throats, tightness in the chest and breathing problems, which typically lasted 24 to 48 hours. In some extreme cases, people were admitted to the hospital with asthma-like symptoms. No deaths were reported in relation to the vaccine.

The other provinces received doses of a different vaccine (Aventis) manufactured in France. While no exact numbers have been given, an online news article from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation ([www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca)) stated that there were "significantly more reports of reactions to the vaccine distributed by BioChem Pharma than from the Aventis batches," which prompted the investigation.<sup>1</sup>

Lab researchers at the Quebec Public Health Laboratory believe a previously undetected protein may be responsible for the reactions. Dr. Danuta Skowronski, an epidemiologist at the British Columbia Center for Disease Control, said the reactions associated with the vaccine suggests that a person's immune system is "sent into overdrive" following inoculation.

As part of the investigation, Skowronski and other investigators will examine 60 subjects divided into three equal groups (20 people who were given Fluviral and suffered a reaction; 20 people who had the shot and no reaction; and 20 people who never received the vaccine). All 60 subjects will undergo skin tests to see what happens when tiny amounts of the vaccine are injected through small pin-pricks in the skin.

"We have to be very careful that we don't unnecessarily dissuade them (Canadian citizens) from getting a vaccine that could be potentially life-saving," said Skowronski. "On the other hand, we recognize that we want people to know about this syndrome and we don't want to keep the information from them."<sup>2</sup>

### References

1. B.C. investigating why flu shots made some sick. CBC.CA News, January 5, 2001.

2. Howell M. Batch of flu shots causes side effects. *Vancouver Sun*, November 10, 2000.

APRIL 2001