

Issue 2 – April 2020

Influenza Edition

~ Before you administer an influenza vaccine check your patient's age and that you have the correct vaccine. The packaging and syringes have the age groups written on them. ~

Influenza Vaccination

Influenza vaccination and Coronavirus

Both influenza and coronavirus can cause serious illness, so getting them together could be extremely dangerous for some people. Severe infection with either virus can result in pneumonia and respiratory failure requiring mechanical ventilation.

The influenza vaccine won't provide protection against COVID 19, however it is extremely important to encourage patients to receive the influenza vaccine to reduce the chance of contracting both infections simultaneously.

Influenza vaccination is recommended for everyone from the age of 6 months, with some groups eligible for free vaccine.

Influenza is a highly contagious viral illness that can affect people of all ages. It is spread from person to person by virus-containing respiratory droplets produced during coughing or sneezing. Annual vaccination is the most effective way of reducing the spread of influenza.

Immunisation providers play a vital role in promoting the importance of the influenza vaccination and should identify individuals at increased risk of influenza and its complications.

Administering the vaccine from late April provides protection in the peak influenza period from June to September. However, influenza vaccine can be administered throughout the year whilst the vaccine is within the expiry date.

All influenza vaccines administered should be recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

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Who should be vaccinated

Influenza vaccine is recommended for anyone aged 6 months and older however, only those in the groups listed below are eligible for free government funded vaccine under the National Immunisation Program (NIP):

- Children aged 6 months to under 5 years;
- All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and older;
- Pregnant women (during any stage of pregnancy);
- People aged 65 years and older;
- All people aged 6 months and older with medical conditions associated with an increased risk of influenza disease complications.

Consider recalling patients in the identified at-risk groups to ensure they are aware of the free seasonal influenza vaccine.

Please note that some additional groups are strongly recommended to have the influenza vaccine due to an increased risk of exposure, or the close contact they have with vulnerable people in high-risk groups. These include: health care workers, workers at aged care facilities, and household contacts of high risk individuals.

Healthcare workers and those who work in aged care facilities are exposed to the influenza virus more than others in the community. For this reason, they are more at risk of transmission of influenza. Even if they do not become unwell themselves, they may pass on influenza to vulnerable people. To reduce the spread of influenza in these settings, annual influenza vaccination is highly recommended.

Egg allergy is NOT a contraindication for influenza vaccine (*see the Australian Immunisation Handbook for further advice*).

Any adverse events following immunisation should be reported to Health Protection Service, Immunisation Unit.

CHILDREN SIX MONTHS TO UNDER FIVE YEARS

Influenza vaccine is free through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for all children from 6 months to under 5 years of age. Children aged 6 months to under 9 years require two doses in the first year they receive the vaccine, this is to maximise the immune response to the vaccine. **Doses should be at least 4 weeks apart.** Children who have received one or more doses of influenza vaccine in previous years will only need one dose in current and future seasons.

Vaxigrip Tetra® will be provided for administration to children from 6 months to under 5 years of age in the ACT.



ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

Influenza vaccine is now free under the NIP for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from 6 months of age.

Nationally, the disease burden from influenza is significantly higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than among non-Indigenous Australians in all age groups.



Other vaccines, including Pneumovax 23 (50 years and over) and Zostavax (70-79 years of age) should also be offered to eligible Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people at the time of their influenza vaccination vaccines.

PREGNANT WOMEN

Government funded influenza vaccine is available for pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy.

Women who acquire influenza during pregnancy are at higher risk of severe complications. Influenza in the later stages of pregnancy increases the risk of complications from influenza and delivering a preterm baby.

Pregnant women who have received an influenza vaccine in 2019 can revaccinate if the 2020 influenza vaccine is available before the end of the pregnancy. Women who received an influenza vaccine before becoming pregnant can also revaccinate during pregnancy to protect the unborn infant.

Vaccination early in the season, regardless of gestational age is optimal. Unvaccinated pregnant women should be vaccinated at any time during the influenza season. Passive transfer of maternal antibodies across the placenta makes vaccination during pregnancy a highly effective measure to protect infants from influenza and pertussis during the first 6 months of life. Pertussis vaccination is recommended between 20 and 32 weeks gestation, but can be given up until the baby is born. Pertussis and Influenza vaccines can be given at the same visit.

PEOPLE AGED 65 YEARS AND OLDER

Anyone aged 65 years or older can receive free influenza vaccine under the NIP. People in this age group are known to have a weaker immune response to immunisation, and a high dose quadrivalent vaccine has been formulated to provide better protection.

Fluad® Quad quadrivalent influenza vaccine will be available under the NIP in 2020 and is latex free. NIP funded vaccines for people aged 65 and over will be available in some pharmacies during 2020.

PEOPLE AGED SIX MONTHS AND OVER WITH CERTAIN MEDICAL CONDITIONS PREDISPOSING THEM TO SEVERE INFLUENZA

Influenza vaccine is free though the NIP for all people aged six months and over with medical conditions associated with an increased risk of influenza disease complications.

| Category | Vaccination strongly recommended for individuals with the following conditions |
|---|--|
| Cardiac disease | Cyanotic congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure, coronary artery disease |
| Chronic respiratory conditions | Severe asthma, cystic fibrosis, bronchiectasis, suppurative lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, chronic emphysema |
| Chronic neurological conditions | Hereditary and degenerative CNS diseases, seizure disorders, spinal cord injuries, neuromuscular disorders |
| Immunocompromising conditions | Immunocompromised due to disease or treatment, asplenia or splenic dysfunction, HIV infection |
| Diabetes and other metabolic disorders | Type 1 or 2 diabetes, chronic metabolic disorders |
| Renal disease | Chronic renal failure |
| Haematological disorders | Haemoglobinopathies |
| Long-term aspirin therapy in children aged 6 months to 10 years | These children are at increased risk of Reye syndrome following influenza infection |

Please refer to [The Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) for advice on persons who are strongly recommended to receive annual influenza vaccination but not eligible for NIP- funded influenza vaccines.

For information on vaccines by age groups please see the schedule at the end of the newsletter.

Influenza virus strains included in the 2020 southern hemisphere seasonal influenza vaccines:

- A (H1N1): an A/Brisbane/02/2018 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- A (H3N2): an A/South Australia/34/2019 (H3N2)-like virus;
- B: a B/Washington/02/2019-like (B/Victoria lineage) virus;
- B: a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (B/Yamagata lineage) virus.

When will influenza vaccines be available?

The Vaccine Management Unit will deliver initial stock of influenza vaccines and information resources in mid to late April. Vaccination can commence as soon as stock is available in your fridge.

- Remember that influenza vaccine can be administered throughout the year whilst you have stock in your fridge that has not yet expired.
- **All vaccines administered should be recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).**

Can you safely store enough vaccines?

We strongly encourage you to assess your fridge capacity to ensure it can safely store the volume of vaccines your practice requires. This will ensure adequate vaccine supplies can be delivered to meet the needs of your practice.

The Vaccine Management Unit will not deliver all or part of your order if the vaccines cannot be safely stored in your refrigerator. This is particularly important during flu season.

Delivery of urgent orders can take up to seven days, especially in periods of peak demand such as the flu season.

Vaccines delivery

Your first influenza vaccine delivery for the season will be a set amount determined by the VMU, to ensure all providers receive a base stock. Further stock can be ordered with your monthly order. Urgent orders can be placed and will be delivered as able. **During the peak time, urgent requests may take up to a week to deliver.**

Data collection

Collection of data on vaccines administered is required to evaluate programs and ascertain coverage rates.

The Influenza and Pneumococcal Vaccine Record Form, Antenatal Pertussis Vaccination Data Collection Form and General Practice Staff Influenza Vaccination Program Data should be sent each fortnight to the Immunisation Unit (fax: 5124 9307 or email: immunisation@act.gov.au).

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia will submit an electronic report on behalf of its members who use compatible software for recording vaccination events. Those pharmacies who are not part of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia will need to submit the Influenza and Pneumococcal Vaccine Record Form.

The documentation of all vaccine doses administered must be electronically entered on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) to maintain accurate health records and vaccine coverage rates.

Reminders

School vaccination catch-up

Students who were in Year 7 or Year 10 in 2019 and missed out on vaccine doses through the school program last year can now receive catch up HPV, dTpa and Meningococcal ACWY vaccines through general practice.

It is important to check a patient's record on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) prior to administering a catch-up vaccine.

| Disease | Vaccine | Dosage | Year 7 | Year 10 |
|---------------------------------------|------------|--|--------|---------|
| Human Papillomavirus (HPV) | Gardasil 9 | 2 doses, with a 6-12-month interval between doses. | ✓ | |
| Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis (dTpa) | Boostrix | 1 dose to cover three diseases | ✓ | |
| Meningococcal ACWY | Nimenrix | 1 dose | | ✓ |

Patient travel alerts

There has been a recent surge of measles and dengue activity overseas, especially across the Pacific Region and South-East Asia. You can check recent overseas measles activity using the interactive HealthMap (<https://www.healthmap.org/en/>).

If you have patients who are travelling overseas, check where they are going and consider/provide advice that the best protection from measles is vaccination with the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. MMR vaccines are government funded and free for anyone born during or since 1966 who has not previously received two measles-containing vaccines.

Falsified oral cholera vaccines circulating in Bangladesh

This Medical Product Alert relates to the circulation of confirmed falsified cholera vaccine called DUKORAL in Bangladesh.

Please be alert for travellers returning from Bangladesh who have received a pre-qualified oral cholera vaccine while traveling. Travellers returning from Bangladesh who are unwell may not immediately think of cholera if they believe they have previously been vaccinated.

National Immunisation Program (NIP) funded influenza vaccines

Check your patient's age

Check that you have the correct vaccine

All influenza vaccines are latex free

Children < 9 years of age will need 2 doses at least 4 weeks apart in their first year of vaccination.

Influenza vaccine can be administered as stock becomes available until the vaccine expires

Age

Influenza vaccine image

Vaxigrip Tetra®

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 6 months to under 5 years | All children aged 6 months to under 5 years, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children and those with certain medical conditions. |
| | <i>Registered for ages 6 months and over.</i> |



Fluarix Tetra®

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 5 to 64 years | People aged 5 to 64 years with medical risk factors predisposing them to severe influenza |
| | All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people aged 6 months to 64 years |
| | Pregnant women |
| | <i>Registered for ages 6 months and over.</i> |



FluQuadri®

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 5 to 64 years | People aged 5 to 64 years with medical risk factors predisposing them to severe influenza |
| | All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people aged 6 months to 64 years |
| | Pregnant women |
| | <i>Registered for ages 6 months and over.</i> |



Afluria Quad®

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 5 to 64 years | People aged 5 to 64 years with medical risk factors predisposing them to severe influenza |
| | All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people aged 5 to 64 years |
| | Pregnant women |
| | <i>Registered for ages 5 years and over.</i> |



Flud® Quad

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 65 years and over (only) | All people 65 years and over |
| | Quadrivalent vaccine |
| | <i>Registered for ages 65 years and over</i> |



Influenza vaccines and vaccination schedule can be viewed at health.act.gov.au/services/immunisation

Eligibility for National Immunisation Program (NIP) funded influenza vaccines

National Immunisation Program (NIP) Categories

| Age | Comments |
|---|--|
| Children from 6 months to under 5 years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children up to 9 years of age who are receiving the influenza vaccine for the first time will require 2 influenza vaccine at least 4 weeks apart. • Children who have received one or more doses of influenza vaccine in previous years will only need one dose. |
| All persons aged ≥65 years | None |
| Pregnant women (during any stage of pregnancy) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influenza vaccine is recommended in every pregnancy and at any stage of pregnancy. • Influenza vaccine can safely be given at the same time as pertussis vaccine. • For women who received an influenza vaccine in 2019 can be revaccinated when 2020 influenza vaccine becomes available before the end of their pregnancy. • For women who receive an influenza vaccine before becoming pregnant, revaccinate during pregnancy to protect the unborn infant |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons aged 6 months and over | None |
| All persons aged >6 months who have certain medical conditions which increase the risk of influenza-related complications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardiac disease • Chronic respiratory conditions • Chronic neurological conditions which affect breathing • Severe asthma (requiring frequent medical consultations or use of multiple medications) • Immunocompromising conditions • Diabetes • Renal disease • Haematological disorders • Children aged 6 months to 10 years on long term aspirin therapy |

Timing of vaccination

- The influenza vaccine should be given before Australia's peak influenza months of June to September.
- Optimal protection against influenza occurs within the first 3 to 4 months following vaccination
- Continue offering the influenza vaccine as long as the vaccines are within their expiry date and the influenza virus is circulating.

For further information please contact the Health Protection Service, Immunisation enquiry line on 51249800