

Annual Seasonal Influenza Vaccine

Influenza (commonly known as ‘flu’) 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. Yearly vaccination is the most important measure to prevent influenza and its complications.

In a typical year, between 5-20% of the population are infected with influenza each year.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been reduced circulation of influenza virus and lower levels of influenza vaccine coverage compared with previous years. With borders reopening, a resurgence of influenza is expected in 2022.

It can take 1-3 days to develop symptoms after coming into contact with the virus. Influenza can be a debilitating illness, causing fever, tiredness, headache, sore muscles, cough, runny nose and sneezing. Complications of influenza include bronchitis, croup, ear infections, pneumonia, heart and other organ damage, brain inflammation and brain damage, and death. The disease can greatly affect a person’s quality of life. Work, study, sporting commitments, socialising, holidays and family life can all be affected if a person contracts the disease.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommends annual influenza vaccination for anyone 6 months of age or over who wishes to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza, however some people are at increased risk of influenza and its complications. For these people, annual vaccination is strongly recommended and is government funded.

Eligibility for free influenza vaccine

Influenza vaccination is free* for:

- All children aged 6 months to under 5 years;
- People aged six months and over with certain underlying medical conditions such as severe asthma, heart or lung disease, diabetes and/or weakened immune systems;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from 6 months of age;
- Pregnant women; and
- People aged 65 years and over.

*Immunisation Providers may charge a consultation fee. You should check this at the time of booking.

When to be vaccinated against influenza

Annual vaccination is recommended before the onset of each influenza season. The period of peak influenza circulation is typically June to September. While protection is generally expected to last for the whole season, best protection occurs in the first 3 to 4 months after

vaccination. April to June is a good time to be vaccinated against influenza, but it is never too late to vaccinate, since influenza can circulate all year round. ATAGI advice is that co-administration of an influenza and a COVID-19 vaccine can occur on the same day. Please check for updates to this advice at <https://www.health.gov.au/committees-and-groups/australian-technical-advisory-group-on-immunisation-atagi>

Common side-effects

The most common side-effects after influenza vaccination are redness, pain and swelling at the injection site. Fever, sore muscles, and tiredness can also occur but usually only last one to two days after vaccinations. Symptoms can mimic influenza infection but are due to the vaccine's interaction with the immune system. Influenza vaccines currently available in Australia do not contain live virus, so cannot cause influenza.

Contraindications to influenza vaccine

People who have had a severe allergic reaction (or anaphylaxis) after a dose of influenza vaccine or any parts of the vaccine should not be vaccinated.

Egg allergies

People with a history of non-anaphylactic egg allergy can receive an age-appropriate, full dose of the vaccine in any immunisation setting.

People with a history of severe reaction, or anaphylaxis to eggs, should be vaccinated in medical facilities with staff experienced in recognising and treating this condition.

Persons with a history of Guillain- Barré syndrome

Influenza vaccination is generally not recommended for people with a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) whose first episode occurred with 6 weeks of receiving an influenza vaccine. Persons with a history of GBS whose first episode was not after influenza vaccination have an extremely low risk of recurrence of GBS after vaccination and the influenza vaccination is recommended for these people. Individual concerns should be discussed, and expert advice sought from the treating physician and/or an immunisation specialist when considering influenza vaccination for a person with a history of GBS.

Need more information?

For more information about influenza vaccination contact the Health Protection Service, Immunisation Information Line during business hours on **(02) 5124 9800**.

Communicable Disease Control Section at Health Protection Service is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.

Acknowledgements

1. The Australian Immunisation Handbook: Australian Government Department of Health. Available from: <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/>
2. Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). ATAGI advice on seasonal influenza vaccines in 2022. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Health, 2022. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/02/atagi-advice-on-seasonal-influenza-vaccines-in-2022.pdf>
3. National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance. Influenza Vaccine, Frequently asked questions. Available from: <http://www.ncirs.edu.au/provider-resources/ncirs-fact-sheets/>

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