



THE FLU VACCINE

YOUR BEST SHOT AT STOPPING THE FLU

INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS IN 2018

- Vaccination is the most effective way of preventing the spread of influenza (commonly known as 'flu') in the community.
- To protect yourself from the flu, you should get vaccinated every year. The flu virus is always changing so the flu vaccine changes too.
- Flu vaccines are available for eligible people for free under the National Immunisation Program from April 2018.
- Getting the vaccine from April will protect you before the peak flu period, from around June to September.
- Children can receive the flu vaccine from six months of age.
- Let your doctor know your age or the age of your child before getting the flu shot. The brand of flu vaccine you should get depends on your age.
- This year, there are new vaccines available to provide better protection for older people aged 65 years and over.
- The flu vaccine does not contain any live virus, so you cannot get the flu from the vaccine.

What is the flu?

Influenza (or 'flu') is caused by a virus that can infect your nose, throat and sometimes lungs. It spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing and close contact, such as kissing and sharing food and drink.

Flu symptoms can start suddenly like fever, headache, tiredness and muscle aches. Elderly people might also experience confusion and children might get an upset stomach and muscle aches. Symptoms can last for a week or more. When severe, complications such as pneumonia and worsening of existing medical conditions can lead to hospitalisation and sometimes death.

Why should I get the flu shot?

Vaccination experts recommend that everyone over six months of age get vaccinated to reduce their chance of getting the flu.

Every year the flu vaccine changes to match the flu virus that is most likely to be around during the flu season. Getting vaccinated every year is the best way of preventing the flu and any associated illness.

There is emerging evidence that the flu vaccine gives the most protection within the first three to four months after it is given. It's important to make sure you are protected in time for when the flu is most common, from around June to September.

When should I get the flu shot?

Free flu vaccines under the National Immunisation Program are available from your vaccination provider from April 2018. Getting vaccinated from April gives you and your children the best protection ready for the peak flu period, from around June to September.

Who is eligible for the free flu shot under the National Immunisation Program?

The vaccine is free under the National Immunisation Program for people who are more likely to be affected by complications from the flu. This includes:

People 65 years and over

Older people aged 65 years and over are more likely to be affected by complications associated with seasonal flu.

Pregnant women

Pregnant women are more likely to be affected by complications associated with the flu. Experts from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation recommend vaccinating against flu at any stage during pregnancy, and preferably before the flu season starts. The flu vaccine given in pregnancy protects pregnant women and their babies during their first months of life. This is when babies are most likely to be affected by infection and are too young to get vaccinated themselves.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can get the flu shot for free at these ages:

- six months to less than five years
- 15 years and over.

People with certain medical conditions

People with some existing medical conditions are more likely to have complications from the flu and are eligible for a free flu vaccine. This includes anyone who is six months of age and over who has:

- heart disease
- severe asthma (requiring frequent medical consultations or use of multiple medications)
- chronic lung conditions
- diseases of the nervous system which affect your breathing
- impaired immunity
- diabetes
- kidney disease
- blood disorders
- children aged six months to 10 years on long-term aspirin therapy.

If you are not sure if these categories apply to you or your child, speak to your doctor, vaccination provider or Aboriginal Health Practitioner/Worker.

If your child is not eligible for a free flu vaccine under the National Immunisation Program, they might still be able to get a free vaccine in your state or territory. Talk to your vaccination provider or local state or territory health department to find out more about free flu vaccines.

You can also buy a flu vaccine if you are not eligible to get a vaccine for free. Speak to your vaccination provider for more information.

New flu vaccines for people aged 65 years and over

This year, there are two new vaccines available to provide better protection for people aged 65 years and over.

If you are aged 65 years or over, speak to your doctor or vaccination provider to find out more about receiving one of the new vaccines. These vaccines cannot be given to people aged under 65 years.

Flu vaccines for children

All flu vaccines are age-specific. Let your doctor know the age of your child before they get their flu vaccine. This will make sure they receive the correct dose and brand.

If your child is aged six months to less than nine years and has never had the flu vaccine before, experts recommend they have two doses in the first year they receive the vaccine. They should have the doses at least four weeks apart. After that only one flu vaccine dose is needed each year.

When a child receives the flu vaccine and pneumococcal vaccine (Prevenar 13) together, they may be more likely to develop a fever. Speak to your doctor or vaccination provider if you have any concerns.

Flu vaccine safety

Common side effects may happen within one to two days after flu vaccination. These include soreness, redness, discomfort and swelling at the injection site, tiredness, muscle aches and low fever. These side effects are usually mild and go away within a few days, normally without any treatment.

The flu vaccine is safe for pregnant women and their babies at any stage during pregnancy.

It is safe for people with an egg allergy, including serious allergic reactions (anaphylaxis), to have flu vaccines.

If you have experienced any of the following talk to your vaccination provider before getting a flu vaccine:

- a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) following a previous flu vaccination
- a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to any flu vaccine ingredient (excluding eggs).

You are encouraged to report any concerning event following flu vaccination to:

- your doctor or vaccination provider
- the Adverse Medicines Events Line on 1300 134 237
- the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) through the 'Safety information' link on the TGA website, or
- state or territory health departments.

Where can I get the flu shot?

You can get the flu shot from a range of vaccination providers which can include general practices (your local doctor), community health clinics, Aboriginal Medical Services, and others. Talk to your doctor, vaccination provider, or Aboriginal Health Practitioner/Worker to arrange your flu shot.

To find out more about flu and the National Immunisation Program:

- call the National Immunisation Hotline: **1800 671 811**
- visit the Department of Health's new immunisation website at health.gov.au/immunisation

All information in this fact sheet is correct as at 19 March 2018. It is valid for the 2018 influenza season.



Other ways to stop the spread of flu:

- Washing your hands regularly with soap and water before and after contact with others, and before handling food. If available, use alcohol-based hand wash if washing facilities are not nearby.
- Covering your nose and mouth with tissues or your elbow when you sneeze or cough. Make sure you throw tissues away and wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- Not sharing personal items such as cups, plates and cutlery.
- Staying at home when you are sick.

State and territory health department contact numbers:

ACT	02 6205 2300	SA	1300 232 272
NSW	1300 066 055	TAS	1800 671 738
NT	08 8922 8044	VIC	1300 882 008
WA	08 9321 1312	QLD	13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)