



# THE FLU VACCINE

## YOUR BEST SHOT AT STOPPING THE FLU

### INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS IN 2019

- Vaccination is the most effective way of reducing the impact of influenza in the community.
- To protect yourself from influenza, you should get vaccinated every year. The influenza virus is always changing so the influenza vaccine changes too.
- The influenza vaccine is recommended for anyone aged 6 months and over and is provided free for those most at risk from influenza and its complications.
- Getting the vaccine from April will protect you before the peak flu period, from around June to September, in most parts of Australia.
- Let your immunisation provider know your age or the age of your child before getting the influenza vaccine. The brand of influenza vaccine you get depends on your age.
- The influenza vaccine does not contain any live virus, so you cannot get influenza from the vaccine.

#### What is influenza?

Influenza 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 drinks.

Influenza symptoms such as fever, headache, tiredness and muscle aches can start suddenly. Elderly people might also experience confusion and children might also get irritable and an upset stomach. 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 influenza vaccine?

**Vaccination experts recommend that everyone six months and over get vaccinated to reduce their chance of getting influenza.**

Every year the influenza vaccine changes to match the influenza virus that is most likely to be around during the influenza season. Getting vaccinated every year is the best way of preventing influenza and its complications.

There is emerging evidence that the influenza 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 influenza is most common, from around June to September, in most parts of Australia.

#### When should I get the influenza vaccine?

Free influenza vaccines under the National Immunisation Program are available from your vaccination provider from April 2019. Getting vaccinated from April gives you and your children the best protection ready for the peak influenza period, from around June to September, in most parts of Australia.

#### Who is eligible for the free influenza vaccine under the National Immunisation Program?

The vaccine is free under the National Immunisation Program for people who are most likely to be affected by complications from influenza. 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 influenza.

##### Pregnant women

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

##### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can get the influenza vaccine for free from six months of age.

## People with certain medical conditions

**People with some existing medical conditions are more likely to have complications from influenza and are eligible for a free influenza 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
- haemoglobinopathies
- 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 immunisation provider.

Some states and territories are funding free influenza vaccines for children aged six months to less than five years. Talk to your immunisation provider or local state or territory health department for more information.

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

## Where can I get the influenza vaccine?

You can get the influenza vaccine from a range of immunisation providers which can include general practices (your family GP), community health clinics, Aboriginal Medical Services, and others. Talk to your immunisation provider to arrange your influenza vaccine.

## Influenza vaccines for people aged 65 years and over

**A specific influenza vaccine is available to provide better protection for people aged 65 years and over.**

If you are aged 65 years or over, speak to your immunisation provider to find out more about receiving the specific influenza vaccine. This specific influenza vaccine cannot be given to people aged under 65 years.

## Influenza vaccines for children

**All influenza vaccines are age-specific. Let your immunisation provider know the age of your child before they get their influenza 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 influenza vaccine before, experts recommend they have two doses of influenza vaccine (given at least 4 weeks apart) in the first year they receive the vaccine. After that only one influenza vaccine dose is needed each year.

It is safe to receive the influenza vaccine with other routine childhood vaccines. When a child receives the influenza vaccine and pneumococcal vaccine (Prevenar 13®) together, they may be more likely to develop a fever. Speak to your immunisation provider if you have any concerns.

## Influenza vaccine safety

Some people might experience side effects within one to two days after influenza 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 without any treatment.

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

It is safe for people with an egg allergy to have influenza vaccines.

**People with a history of serious allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) to egg should receive their influenza vaccine in a medical facility with staff experienced in recognising and treating anaphylaxis.**

If you have experienced any of the following talk to your immunisation provider before getting an influenza vaccine:

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

**You are encouraged to report any concerning event following influenza vaccination to:**

- your immunisation provider
- pharmacists from NPS MedicineWise on 1300 134 237
- state or territory health departments, or
- the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) through the 'Safety information' link on the TGA website.

## To find out more about influenza and the National Immunisation Program:

- call the National Immunisation Program Information Line: **1800 671 811**
- visit the Department of Health's immunisation website at [health.gov.au/immunisation](http://health.gov.au/immunisation)

All information in this fact sheet is correct as at 21 March 2019. It is valid for the 2019 influenza season.



## Other ways to stop the spread of influenza:

- Washing your hands regularly preferably with soap and water before and after contact with others, and before handling food. Alternatively, use alcohol-based hand rub.
- Covering your nose and mouth with tissues or your elbow when you sneeze or cough. Make sure you throw tissues away and perform hand hygiene 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)