



ASSOCIATED HEALTH
PRACTITIONERS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS INFLUENZA?

Influenza, often referred to as the flu, is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the A & B strains of the Influenza virus spread by virus-containing droplets produced during coughing or sneezing. Compared with other viral respiratory infections such as the common cold, influenza infection can cause severe illness and can also precipitate serious and life-threatening complications.

Influenza is often characterised by:

- Rapid onset
- Fever, cough, sore throat, runny nose
- Fatigue, headache
- Muscle aches

Although the fever and body aches usually last for 3 - 5 days, coughing and fatigue can persist for two weeks or more. Some may have mild disease, but others are restricted to bed for a week or more, unable to work or care for their family. For some, flu can cause severe illness, hospitalisation and life-threatening complications. Those more at risk of serious disease are babies, people aged over 65 years, people with underlying illnesses and pregnant women.

2. 2022 INFLUENZA VACCINATION STRAIN

The flu virus is constantly changing, and the vaccine changes every year to ensure protection against the most recent and common circulating strains.

Twice annually, the World Health Organisation comes together to analyse influenza virus surveillance data generated by the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS), and issues recommendations on the composition of the influenza vaccines for the following influenza season. These recommendations are used by the national vaccine regulatory agencies and the pharmaceutical companies to develop, produce and license influenza vaccines.

It has been recommended that Quadrivalent vaccines for use in the 2022 Southern Hemisphere influenza season contain the following:

- an A/Victoria/2570/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus; and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

This represents 2 changes to the 2021 Southern Hemisphere influenza strain.

3. WHO SHOULD HAVE THE FLU SHOT?

The Australian Government recommends that everyone over the age of 6 months has the flu shot every year.

Getting vaccinated against the flu helps protect both you and the people around you. It's particularly important to protect vulnerable people in the community who can't be vaccinated, such as babies who are younger than 6 months and adults with low immunity.

4. WHO SHOULD NOT HAVE A FLU SHOT?

Immunisation against the flu is not appropriate for people who:

- have had a serious allergy (such as anaphylaxis) from a previous flu vaccine
- have had a serious allergy (such as anaphylaxis) to a component of the flu vaccine (e.g. eggs)
- are unwell (with a temperature over 38.5oC) at the time of their appointment
- are aged under 6 months.

If you have a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome or anaphylaxis to eggs, it is recommended that you speak with your doctor or immunisation nurse before receiving a vaccination.

5. WHEN SHOULD I HAVE THE FLU SHOT?

Annual immunisation is recommended between April and May each year. Flu season in Australia usually runs from June to September, peaking in August, so it is important to be vaccinated on time to ensure your immunity is at its strongest and most effective at this time.

Please note, it is safe for the flu vaccine to be co-administered with the Covid-19 vaccine; meaning the two vaccines can now be given on the same day.

6. WHY DO I NEED TO HAVE THE FLU SHOT EVERY YEAR?

Protection against influenza requires annual vaccination with a vaccine containing the most recent strains. Each year, the World Health Organization recommends the strains to be included in influenza vaccines based on global influenza epidemiology.

There are two main reasons for getting a yearly flu vaccine:

- Flu viruses are frequently changing and vaccines are updated according to the most recent and common circulating strains based on global influenza epidemiology.
- A person's immune protection from influenza vaccination begins to wane over time and annual vaccination is recommended.

7. WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS FROM THE FLU SHOT?

Common and mild side effects include soreness, redness, pain and swelling at the injection site; fever, vomiting, malaise and muscle pain or generally feeling unwell. Mostly these side effects are mild and resolve within a few days, usually without any treatment.

Allergic reactions are uncommon after vaccination, but can be severe in some people. These reactions are due to an allergy to egg protein or to other components of the vaccine, including the antibiotics neomycin and polymyxin, which are in the vaccine in small amounts. Some severe allergic reactions can happen within 15 minutes which is why it is important to wait in the allocated area for 15 minutes after being vaccinated.

It's important to remember that the side effects show the vaccine is triggering an immune response, which is what it's designed to do.

8. CAN THE FLU SHOT GIVE ME THE FLU?

No. All flu vaccines in Australia are inactivated which means they are not live and not capable of causing illness like the real influenza virus.

9. HOW DOES THE VACCINE WORK?

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine.

10. HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE INFLUENZA VACCINE?

The influenza vaccine provides a good level of protection which is 70% - 90% effective in healthy adults. It is important to know that it takes around two weeks after vaccination for a person to develop protection against influenza infection. Also, the influenza vaccine does not protect against respiratory illness caused by other viruses, such as the common cold

11. IS IT SAFE FOR ME TO GET THE FLU VACCINE IF I AM PREGNANT?

Yes. The vaccine is considered safe to use in pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy.

The National Immunisation Program (NIP) strongly recommends flu immunisation for women who are pregnant or breast-feeding as it not only helps provide protection against the flu for the mother, but also ongoing protection to the newborn in early infancy.

12. IS IT SAFE FOR ME TO GET THE FLU VACCINE IF I HAVE AN EGG ALLERGY?

The influenza vaccine is grown in eggs. But the traces of egg protein that remain after the vaccine is made are so small that the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCI) says both adults and children with egg allergy can be safely vaccinated against the flu. The risk of anaphylaxis in response to the vaccine is very low, estimated at 1.35 cases per 1 million doses.

13. SHOULD I GET THE FLU VACCINE IF I AM FEELING UNWELL?

If you are suffering from an acute feverish illness (temperature equal to or above 38.5 °C) you should not receive the vaccine until you have fully recovered. If you are suffering from a mild illness and do not have a fever, there is no reason why you should not receive the vaccine.

If you are feeling unwell at the time of your vaccination appointment, please discuss your symptoms with your immunisation nurse.

14. HOW CAN I PREVENT GETTING AND SPREADING THE FLU?

There are some basic preventative measures to reduce your risk of getting and spreading the flu:

- Having an annual immunisation in autumn each year (April to May) prior to the peak of the flu season
- Maintaining good hand and respiratory hygiene with regular and thorough hand washing with soap or hand sanitiser and using a tissue or your elbow to cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing to reduce the spread of the virus.
- Following coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose, ensure appropriate hand washing or hand sanitiser techniques are followed.
- Stay at home while you are unwell. In particular, avoid going to work or school or visiting busy public places.

Does the flu vaccine protect against COVID-19?

The flu vaccine won't protect you against COVID-19 (coronavirus), but it will reduce your risk of influenza – which leads to thousands of hospitalisations each year. By getting the flu vaccine, you can reduce the strain on the health service.

For more information on the flu vaccine, go to the Department of Health website or call the National Immunisation Hotline on 1800 671 811.

15. WHAT SAFETY PRECAUTIONS WILL BE IN PLACE TO PROTECT AGAINST COVID-19 WHILST GETTING MY VACCINATION?

All participants will need to fill in an electronic questionnaire prior to arriving for their vaccination service. If you are unwell with any COVID-19 or flu-like symptoms we ask that you do not attend your onsite clinic. Similarly, if you meet current State and Territory guidelines for quarantine or have been advised by authorities to quarantine, please do not attend.

Cleaning and sanitising procedures include, frequent hand sanitiser use, disinfecting of vaccination areas and spaces between participants. We will be reinforcing and adhering to social distancing measures in all waiting areas and aim to minimise wait time by providing the pre-immunisation checklist and consent form via email with your appointment reminder 24 hours prior to your appointment.

As always, we encourage good hand and respiratory hygiene, and social distancing at all times at our onsite clinics. Personal protective equipment use, including masks, will be guided by current State and territory guidelines.

16. WHO HAS ACCESS TO MY PERSONAL INFORMATION DURING THE VACCINATION PROCESS?

We may provide your personal information to third parties for a purpose directly related to your vaccine administration. This includes (but is not limited to) disclosure of your personal information to the Australian Immunisation Register, Medicare or medical personnel who are the service providers of the immunisation, other third parties as required by law and otherwise in accordance with our privacy policy which can be accessed on our website at www.associatedhealth.com.au/privacy-policy

Sources:

1. Australian Government Department of Health. The Australian Immunisation Handbook 10th Ed: Influenza. <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/vaccine-preventable-diseases/influenza-flu> (Accessed January 2021). 2. WHO. Fact sheet: Influenza (Seasonal). 2018. [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/influenza-\(seasonal\)](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/influenza-(seasonal)) (Accessed January 2021). 3. National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance. Factsheet Influenza. May 2019 www.ncirs.org.au/sites/default/files/2019-06/Influenza-factsheet_31%20May%202019_Final_1.pdf (Accessed January 2021). 4. National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (Influenza vaccine for Australians) <https://www.ncirs.org.au/> (Accessed January 2021) 5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Misconceptions about seasonal flu and flu vaccines) <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/> (Accessed January 2021). 6. Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) <https://www.health.gov.au/committees-and-groups/australian-technical-advisory-group-on-immunisation-atagi-covid-19-working-group-7> 7. Australia's COVID-19 vaccine national roll-out strategy. www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/01/australia-s-covid-19-vaccine-national-roll-out-strategy.pdf (Accessed January 2021) 8. CDC. Similarities and Differences between Flu and COVID-19. www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm. (Accessed January 2021). 9. CDC. Symptoms of Covid. www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html (Accessed January 2021). 10. CDC. Flu vs Covid. www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm (Accessed January 2021). 11. CDC. Flu Symptoms. www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/symptoms.htm (Accessed January 2021) 12. CDC. Cold Vs Flu. www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/coldflu.htm (Accessed January 2021). 13. CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine. www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/keyfacts.htm (Accessed January 2021). 10. Media release Record 16.5 million flu vaccines to protect Australians. www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/record-165-million-flu-vaccines-to-protect-australians (Accessed January 2021).