

STAY SAFE, STAY WELL, WORK WELL



Flu Vaccination Program

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Everything you need to know

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What is influenza?

The "Flu"

- ✓ **A highly infectious viral illness caused by the influenza virus**
- ✓ **More severe than the common cold**
- ✓ **Symptoms include rapid onset of fever, muscle aches, joint pains, headache, sore throat, cough and a generalised feeling of unwellness**

Most people think when they have a runny nose or sore throat that they have the "flu" but usually, this is not the case. They usually have a common cold, which is a short-term, mild illness which, although inconvenient, rarely causes significant debility.

The "cold" is caused by a range of viruses, which are different to the influenza virus. Some people who get the flu may have very few symptoms, while others are so unwell that they are confined to bed. It can last up to 10 days, sometimes longer, and can be complicated by a range of secondary problems including pneumonia and even death in high-risk individuals.

Check out these frequently asked questions...

Can I get the flu from the vaccination?

No. The vaccine contains only inactivated virus particles (a virus that has been concentrated, killed then broken apart) and is therefore incapable of causing influenza infection.

People who have developed a runny nose or sore throat after vaccination have usually developed another viral illness.

How effective is the influenza vaccine?

It prevents illness in up to 60% of young children and healthy adults under 65. Vaccination also helps protect high-risk individuals from pneumonia or being hospitalised because of the flu.



How often is flu vaccination required?



The flu vaccine is required on an annual basis as the influenza virus evolves to different strains each year.

Vaccines are developed prior to each flu season to provide protection against the most prevalent strains.

Immunity from the vaccine also diminishes over time, making annual vaccination crucial for maintaining strong immunity.

How long does it take for me to be protected and how long does my protection last?

You will form antibodies to fight the flu around 14 days after being vaccinated. Your antibodies will peak at around 4-6 weeks – this is when you are most protected. Your antibodies will gradually decline but you will remain protected for around 9 months to 1 year.

I have had a Covid-19 vaccination, should I have a Flu vaccination?

The flu and COVID-19 are caused by different viruses and so require different vaccines. It's important to be vaccinated against both to protect yourself and your community.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advise that you can be vaccinated for COVID-19 and the flu on the same day.



Who should not be given the vaccine?

There are a few contraindications to the influenza vaccine, as it is a highly purified, and inactivated form of the influenza virus.

Contraindications include:

- Anyone with a known allergy to gentamicin, neomycin or polymyxin antibiotics.
- Anyone with a known allergy to other components of the vaccine: polysorbate 80, octoxinol 9 and formaldehyde.
- Anyone with a severe allergy to eggs who has previously experienced an anaphylactic reaction to the flu vaccine (developed swelling of the tongue, lips or respiratory distress or collapse).
- Anyone with a present high fever

After you have your influenza vaccine, your usual dose of some medicines may be affected. These medicines include:

- Carbamazepine e.g., Tegretol (used in epilepsy or convulsions)
- Phenobarbitone (Used in epilepsy, or convulsions, anxiety, insomnia)
- Phenytoin e.g., Dilantin (used in epilepsy or convulsions)
- Theophylline (used for asthma)
- Warfarin (used to prevent blood clots).


If you are on any of these medicines, please consult your own Doctor ASAP to see if they wish to organise a blood test within a few days of your vaccination to check your levels of medication.

What is the difference between the flu vaccine for those aged 65 years+ and the standard seasonal flu vaccines?

Flu often hits older people harder than younger people and their immune response to the standard flu vaccines isn't as strong either. Flud Quad, a flu vaccine for people aged 65 and over, may increase protection for older people against flu infection. It provides active immunisation against the four influenza virus strains, just like the standard quadrivalent seasonal flu vaccine, but also has an additional ingredient to help improve the immune response.

HCA does not offer Flud Quad as part our immunisation program. This vaccine is only offered as part of the Government's National Immunisation Program (NIP) and is not available on the private market. If you are aged 65 or over, talk to your GP for advice on which annual flu vaccine is best for you.





I have a cold or have already had the flu this year. Can I still have a flu vaccination?

Even if you have already had the flu this year, you will still benefit from the vaccine as it will protect you against other flu strains.

Please do not attend your appointment if you are unwell or have any COVID-19 symptoms.

What if I am pregnant, breastfeeding, or on IVF?

The medical profession and governments world-wide have identified pregnant women as a high priority group for receiving an influenza vaccination. This is based on evidence that the vaccine is safe for both pregnant women and their unborn child.

Evidence shows the vaccine reduces the risk of illness and hospitalisation due to influenza and pneumonia in vaccinated pregnant women. Protection against influenza extends to the newborn baby until they can be vaccinated at 6 months of age.

The vaccine may be administered during all stages of pregnancy, including the first trimester.

The vaccine is safe to be given while breast feeding and can help protect your newborn from the flu until they can be vaccinated at 6 months. This is because antibodies can be passively transferred to babies via breast milk.

What else can I do to avoid getting the flu or a cold?

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and dispose of the tissue in a rubbish bin after you use it.
- Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, especially after you cough or sneeze.
- Don't share eating and drinking utensils or share food and drinks.
- Regularly clean surfaces such as desks, taps and fridge doors as flu viruses can live on these kinds of surfaces for several hours.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as germs are commonly spread this way. Boost your immune system with a balanced diet, exercise and rest and try to reduce stress.

Why do I have to give my Medicare number when I book online?

Your Medicare number and the reference number next to your name is required to upload evidence of your vaccination to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

When you need to access a record of your flu vaccination, you can access this from MyGov website. Your doctor will also be able to see that you have been vaccinated against influenza.





What is the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR)?

The AIR is a national register to record an individual's vaccination history. HCA are a recognised vaccination provider in Australia and our online booking system directly links to the AIR.



What should I expect on the day?

- The appointment will take approximately 2.5 minutes
- You will need to have your arm ready for vaccination by removing your jacket or jumper
- The nurse will ask some questions to ensure it is safe for you to have the vaccine
- Please be aware the nurse will not swab your skin or wear gloves during the vaccination as per best practice guidelines
- The nurse will administer the vaccination and give you vaccination after-care advice
- You will need to remain near the vaccination area for 15 minutes after immunisation. (If you have an egg allergy, you may need to wait 30 minutes.)

Why do I have to wait around for 15 minutes after my vaccination?

- The flu vaccine is generally well tolerated. However, it is important to stay close by for 15 minutes (30 minutes if you have an egg allergy) so that the vaccination nurse can provide rapid medical care if needed (e.g., if you experience an adverse reaction to the vaccine)
- Alert the nurse immediately if you feel unwell within 15 minutes of your vaccination
- Do not hesitate to report back to the nurse if you feel unwell at any other time
- If the nurse has left your worksite, report immediately to your workplace first-aid officer

What are the possible side effects after vaccination?

As with all medicines, the flu vaccines may produce some mild side effects. These generally appear within 24 - 48 hours and usually resolve quickly and without any treatment.

Some common side effects may include:

- A reaction around the injection site such as tenderness, bruising, redness, warmth, pain, swelling or the formation of a hard lump
- Some people report getting flu-like symptoms such as a headache, tiredness, low-grade fever, sore throat, and aching muscles. These symptoms do not mean you have the flu, they are most likely your body's natural response to the vaccine and are mild and short-lasting
- See your GP or pharmacist if you are concerned about your symptoms, they get worse or don't go away after a few days. (As flu and COVID-19 can have similar symptoms, it's best to check in with a health professional – you can have a telehealth consult).

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If you have any concerns or questions
please call Healthcare Australia on

 **1 300 268 822**

during office hours or talk to
your General Practitioner.

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