



Some things deserve more time and attention.  
*We believe your health is one of them.*

## 2020 Flu Vaccination Information Update

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31 March 2020

### What is influenza?

The flu (also called influenza) is a very contagious infection of the airways which spreads easily from person to person.

**It is especially serious for babies, people over 65 years and pregnant women.**

Compared with other viral respiratory infections (such as the common cold), the flu can cause severe illness and, in some cases, life-threatening complications or even death.

The flu infects many parts of the body, including the nose, throat and lungs. Symptoms can include fevers, sore throat, cough, fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, runny nose and watery eyes. The fevers and body aches usually last for 3-5 days, but coughing and fatigue can often persist for 2-3 weeks.

### Who should get a flu shot?

We strongly recommend the flu vaccination for everyone aged 6 months and over. **Due to the current Coronavirus pandemic, it is strongly advised that all people over 6 months have the flu vaccine in 2020.** This reduces the risk of potentially having both Coronavirus and influenza at the same time, which could lead to serious illness or even death.

**Vaccination is a safe and effective way to protect you, your family and your community from serious disease caused by the flu.**

### What are the benefits of getting vaccinated?

There are lots of benefits associated with getting a flu vaccine each year. Not only do you reduce your own risk of becoming infected with influenza, but you also help protect other people in the community who are at greater risk of getting seriously ill from the flu. This includes more vulnerable groups such as the elderly, people with chronic health conditions and young children (especially infants younger than 6 months who are too young to get vaccinated). The more people who are vaccinated in our community, the less likely the disease will spread. Flu vaccinations may also reduce the severity of your illness and can lessen the risk of more serious flu outcomes, like hospitalisation and death.



### Can the vaccine stop me from getting the flu and how effective is it?

Unfortunately the flu vaccine doesn't provide complete protection against influenza. But it does provide a good level of protection, which is 70% - 90% effective in healthy adults.

**It's important to know that it takes around two weeks for a person to develop protection against the flu following their vaccination. During this time, there is still a risk of contracting the flu if you come in contact with an infected person before your body mounts an immune response.**

It's also worth noting that the flu vaccine does not protect against all strains of the flu or other respiratory illnesses caused by viruses, such as the common cold.

### Can I catch influenza from the vaccine?

No. It is not possible to catch influenza from having the vaccine, as it contains only inactivated virus particles. Because the virus in the vaccine is not live, it cannot spread through your respiratory system or cause illness like the real virus. The mild symptoms some people get after vaccination are usually related to the vaccine generating an immune response. This is how vaccines work — they train your immune system to recognise parts of the influenza virus, so it can respond when it encounters the real thing.

### Do I need to get vaccinated against the flu every year?

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

1. Flu viruses change frequently and flu vaccines are usually updated from one season to the next to protect against the most recent and common circulating strains.
2. A person's immune protection from influenza vaccination wanes over time.

### Does my child need 2 doses of the flu vaccine?

If your child is aged 6 months to under 9 years, and is getting the flu vaccination for the **first time this year**, it is recommended that they receive 2 doses, 1 month apart. The vaccine consumable is free this year for children between 6 months and less than 5 years, however a no-gap consultation fee of \$17.50 still applies (with full medicare rebate available).

## Who decides on the composition of the vaccines each year?

Each year the World Health Organisation makes recommendations about which virus strains to include in the vaccines for the coming year. The Australian Department of Health takes these recommendations into account when designing the Australian National Immunisation Program.

### 2020 vaccine composition for people less than 65

This year the vaccine for people aged less than 65 is a Quadrivalent, which includes the following four inactivated influenza virus strains:

- A/Brisbane/02/2018 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus
- A/South Australia/34/2019 (H3N2)-like virus
- B/Washington/02/2019-like (B/Victoria lineage) virus
- B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (B/Yamagata lineage) virus



### 2020 vaccine composition for people over 65

As you get older, your immune system weakens, and research shows the antibody response in older people after getting the traditional flu vaccine isn't as high as it is in younger people. For this reason, the government-funded vaccine for people over 65 this year is different to that which is being offered to the rest of the community. It is still a Quadrivalent vaccine, but it is specifically **designed to provoke a stronger immune response** and includes the following four inactivated influenza virus strains:

- A/Brisbane/02/2018 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus
- A/South Australia/34/2019 (H3N2)-like virus
- B/Washington/02/2019-like (B/Victoria lineage) virus
- B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (B/Yamagata lineage) virus



## What are the possible side effects?

Common side effects following a flu vaccination include fever, redness, pain and swelling at the injection site, vomiting and malaise. These side effects are usually mild and resolve within a few days, usually without any treatment. Generally reactions may occur within a few hours following vaccination and may last 1 to 2 days. 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. That is why it is important to wait in the practice for 15 minutes after being vaccinated.

## Should I receive the vaccine if I am unwell?

If you are suffering from an acute illness and have a fever (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 doctor or the nurse.

## Is it safe to get the flu shot while pregnant?

Yes, the vaccine can be safely given during any stage of pregnancy. Pregnant people are at increased risk of severe

disease or complications from the flu. Vaccinating against flu during pregnancy not only protects pregnant people but can also provide ongoing protection to a newborn baby for the first six months after birth.

## When is the best time to get vaccinated?

Evidence suggests protection from the flu vaccine begins to wane 3-4 months after it is administered. Because peak flu season is expected to be June to September this year, timing of your vaccination is important, which is why our clinics are scheduled to start in early April.

## How much does it cost to be vaccinated?

Costs vary depending on whether you qualify for the free Government Funded vaccine consumable however, the most you will be out of pocket is \$23 if you need to purchase the vaccine from us (if you don't meet the government criteria).

A consultation fee also applies for each patient, however Medicare will rebate this cost back to you in full. Talk to one of the team for more information.

## Government Funded eligibility criteria

In 2020, the following people are eligible to receive the vaccine consumable for free under the National Immunisation Program:

- Children 6 months to less than 5
- People aged 65 and over
- Pregnant people
- Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander people over 6 months
- People with medical conditions that can lead to complications from influenza (e.g. severe asthma, lung or heart disease, low immunity or diabetes)

## Call our reception team to register your interest to receive your 2020 flu vaccination

We are experiencing high demand for influenza vaccinations combined with shortages of government funded doses (which are beyond our control).

If you would like to go on the waiting list please call reception on 07 5301 9828. We are working our way through this list on a daily basis and we expect to be able to offer vaccinations to our existing patients as soon as possible over the course of April and May.

Due to the increased logistics this year of organising vaccination clinics which meet COVID-19 social distancing criteria, we need to structure our clinics and patient flows in a very specific way. As a result, we will only be able to offer specific appointment times to existing patients of the practice.

Please be assured that the recommended timeframe to receive your vaccination is mid-April to the end of May.

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### Information Sources

Chief Medical Officer | Australian Government Department of Health  
Immunisation Program | Queensland Health  
World Health Organisation | [www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/recommendations/2020\\_south/en/](http://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/recommendations/2020_south/en/)

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