


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

## 2023 Influenza and COVID-19 Vaccination Information Update

By Dr Nicola Kettleton-Butler

 **It is important to always call before visiting your doctor or health facility to advise if you have any infectious symptoms. We will still be able to help you, but we will ensure appropriate infection control measures are in place to protect vulnerable patients.**

### What is COVID-19?

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Most people experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some become seriously ill. Older people and those with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

But anyone can become seriously ill or die at any age from COVID-19.

### COVID-19 Symptoms

COVID-19 affects different people in different ways. Most infected people will develop mild to moderate illness and recover without hospitalization.

| Common Symptoms   | Less Common Symptoms   |
|---|--|
| Fever, cough, tiredness, loss of taste/smell  | Sore throat, headache, aches and pains, diarrhoea, rash, discolouration of fingers/toes, red/irritated eyes. |
| Serious Symptoms  |  |
| Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, loss of speech or mobility, or confusion, chest pain.<br><b>Seek immediate medical attention if you have serious symptoms.</b> |  |

People with mild symptoms who are otherwise healthy should manage their symptoms at home. On average it takes 5–6 days from when someone is infected with the virus for symptoms to show, however it can take up to 14 days.

### What is influenza?

Influenza is an acute and very contagious respiratory infection caused by strains of influenza viruses which circulate in all parts of the world. It causes illnesses that range in severity and can sometimes lead to hospitalization and death.

**Influenza is especially serious for babies, people over 65 years and pregnant women, health workers and those with serious medical conditions.**

### Influenza Symptoms

Influenza is characterized by a sudden onset of fever, cough (usually dry), headache, muscle and joint pain, severe malaise (feeling unwell), sore throat and a runny nose. The cough can be severe and can last two or more weeks.

## How can I protect against infection from Influenza and COVID-19?

You can protect yourself and others from infection by:

- socially distancing at least 1.5 metres
- wearing a properly fitted mask
- washing your hands / using an alcohol-based rub frequently
- **getting vaccinated** when recommended by government / medical guidance.

## How does influenza and COVID-19 spread?

Influenza and COVID-19 viruses are highly contagious. They can spread from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing, or breathe. They can also be spread by hands after touching contaminated surfaces. This is why it is so important to practice respiratory etiquette (e.g. coughing into a flexed elbow or a tissue), wash your hands regularly, and stay away from other people if you are unwell.

## Who should get a vaccination and is it safe?

Vaccination for both Influenza and COVID-19 is a safe and effective way to protect yourself, your family and your community from serious disease caused by the flu and COVID-19.

**Flu shot** - we strongly recommend **flu vaccination** for everyone aged 6 months and over.

**COVID-19 shot** - We strongly support the COVID-19 vaccination program in Australia.

If you are 18+ and it has been 6 months since your last COVID-19 vaccination or a verified COVID-19 infection you are due for a shot.

## Can the vaccines prevent me from getting the flu or COVID-19?

Unfortunately, vaccination doesn't provide **complete protection** against flu or COVID-19, as immunity wanes, **but evidence shows they provide good protection for about 6 months**.

It's also worth noting that the flu and COVID-19 vaccines do not protect against all strains of the flu, COVID-19, or other respiratory illnesses caused by viruses, such as the common cold.

## How long before I develop an immune response to a vaccination?

It usually takes around two weeks for a person to develop a protective immune response against the flu or COVID-19 following vaccination. During this time, there is still a risk of contracting the flu or COVID-19 if you encounter the virus *before* your body mounts an immune response to the vaccination, or if you encounter a strain which you haven't been vaccinated against.

## Can I get a Flu shot and a COVID-19 vaccine on the same day?

Yes. COVID-19 vaccines can be given on the same as an influenza vaccine. Evidence shows co-administration is safe and produces a good immune response. The COVID-19 vaccine does not protect against the flu (and vice versa), so you should have both (if you are due).

## Can I catch influenza or COVID-19 from the vaccine?

No. It is not possible to catch influenza or COVID-19 from the vaccines. 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 virus so it can respond when it encounters the real thing.

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

Yes. Flu viruses change frequently, and flu vaccines are updated from one season to the next to protect against the most recent and common circulating strains.

## How often should I get a COVID-19 vaccination?

The advice on this will evolve as we learn more about the disease. At present, if you are 18+ and it has been more than 6 months since your last dose (or verified COVID-19 infection), then you are due.

## Why do I need to be vaccinated so often?

*A person's immune protection from influenza AND COVID-19 vaccinations wanes over time.*

Additionally, viruses constantly mutate, so the composition of vaccinations must also change over time to maintain effectiveness.

## 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.

## Who decides on the composition of the flu vaccine each year?

Each year the World Health Organisation makes recommendations about which virus strains to include in the vaccines for the coming year. Generally speaking, the four most dangerous and prevailing circulating strains are chosen. The Australian Department of Health takes these recommendations into account when designing the Australian National Immunisation Program.

### 2023 flu vaccine composition (people under 65)

This year the flu vaccine includes the following four inactive influenza virus strains:

- A/Sydney/5/2021 (H1N1) pdm09-like virus
- A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus
- B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus
- B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus

### 2023 flu vaccine composition for people over 65

As you get older your immune system weakens. Research has shown that the antibody response in older people after getting the typical flu vaccine isn't as high as it is in younger people. For this reason, the government-funded vaccine for people over 65 is specifically designed to provoke a stronger immune response. It includes the same four virus strains outlined above.

## Which type of COVID-19 vaccines are you using for boosters?

We are offering the Moderna vaccine because it has recently been updated against Omicron strains.

## What are the possible side effects of flu and COVID-19 vaccination?

Common side effects include fever, redness, pain or 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 very uncommon after vaccination but can be severe in some people. 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. Medical experts have studied COVID-19 vaccines to make sure they are safe. Most side effects are mild. They may start on the day of vaccination and last for one or two days. As with any vaccine or medicine, there may be rare or unknown side effects. There is a rare risk of myocarditis and pericarditis (heart inflammation) following Moderna and Pfizer vaccines.

Tell your health care provider if you have any side effects after vaccination that you are worried about.

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

If you are suffering from an acute illness and have a fever (temperature equal to or above 38.3 °c) you should not receive the vaccine/s 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 or a COVID-19 shot while pregnant?

Yes, the vaccines can be safely given during any stage of pregnancy. Pregnant people are at increased risk of severe disease or complications from the flu or COVID-19. Vaccinating against flu during pregnancy not only protects the mother but can also provide protection to a newborn baby for the first six months after birth.

## When is the best time to get vaccinated?

Protection from both flu and COVID-19 vaccines begins to wane after 3-4 months. Because peak flu season is expected to be June to August this year, timing of your flu vaccination is important. To give you maximum protection, authorities recommend flu vaccination just prior to the anticipated influenza season, which is why our clinics are scheduled to start in May.

## How much does it cost to be vaccinated?

**COVID-19 vaccinations** are fully funded by the Government for anyone with a valid Medicare card, so there are no out-of-pocket costs.

**For influenza vaccination**, provided you receive your shot in one of our dedicated clinics we will direct bill the consultation cost to Medicare. If you don't meet the criteria for a government funded influenza vaccine consumable, you will need to purchase one from us at a **cost of \$23**.




Please note – consultation fees may apply if you have your influenza shot outside of our vaccination clinic format.

Due to logistics, COVID-19 vaccinations are only available in our vaccination clinic format.

## Eligibility criteria for QLD Government influenza vaccine

In 2023, the following people are eligible to receive a free flu vaccine consumable:

- 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)

 7 Fourth Avenue, Caloundra, QLD 4551  
 (07) 5301 9828 |  (07) 5491 4604

[www.saltwatermedical.com.au](http://www.saltwatermedical.com.au)

Information Sources Australian Government Department of Health | Queensland Health | World Health Organisation



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