

Frequently Asked Questions

2023 Funded Annual Influenza Program

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is an infection of the nose, throat and sometimes lungs caused by influenza viruses. It spreads very easily and quickly between people through coughing, talking, sneezing and contact with contaminated hands, tissues and other infected items. Flu can cause serious illness and complications for anyone, but some groups of people are at even higher risk of serious flu infection, complications and hospitalisation.

What is the flu vaccine?

A vaccine is given to build protection from illness. When a person is vaccinated against flu, their body produces an immune response in the same way their body would after exposure to the flu virus. When a person comes into contact with the virus in the future, their immune system will know how to prevent or reduce the severity of the disease.

The flu vaccine is an inactivated vaccine. An inactivated vaccine contains parts of the virus which have been inactivated. The inactivated virus cannot reproduce itself or cause disease. The advantage of vaccines produced in this way is that the body still recognises the virus and produces an immune response.

Are there different strains of flu?

Flu is caused by influenza viruses classified as type A, B or C. Only influenza A and B viruses are included in seasonal flu vaccines as they cause the majority of disease in humans.

The strains used in seasonal flu vaccines can change from year to year depending on which viruses are predicted to circulate in each upcoming season.

How can I protect myself and my family from flu?

The best way to protect yourself and your family is to have the flu vaccine every year. Flu viruses change over time, so a new flu vaccine is made each year. Flu vaccination is recommended for anyone aged 6 months and over to reduce the chance of becoming ill with flu. The vaccine is free for certain people at higher risk of disease and developing complications if they get influenza.

What is the funded flu vaccine program?

Through the National Immunisation Program (NIP), the Commonwealth Government provides free flu vaccines for the following groups:

- > pregnant women
- > people six months of age or over with certain underlying chronic medical conditions
- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over
- > people aged 65 years and over
- > all children aged six months to less than five years.



Adults and children experiencing homelessness are eligible to receive a free flu vaccine under the state funded program.

Talk to your doctor if you are not sure whether you, or a family member, can have a free vaccine.

Why do some people get a free vaccine?

Some groups of people are more likely to be seriously affected by flu than others and suffer more complications that can lead to hospitalisation. People in these high-risk groups are provided with a free flu vaccine.

Who can have the free flu vaccine?

Pregnant women

Women who have flu infection late in their pregnancy are more likely to have complications or have a preterm baby.

Vaccinating pregnant women also helps protect their babies in the first few months when they are too young to be vaccinated themselves and are at high risk of serious complications and hospitalisation from flu.

Pregnant women who had the 2022 flu vaccine early in their pregnancy are recommended to have the 2023 flu vaccine if it is available before their baby is born.

Pregnant women who have received the 2023 flu vaccine prior to becoming pregnant are recommended to receive the 2023 flu vaccine again during their pregnancy to protect the baby.

People 6 months of age or over with certain medical conditions

People with certain medical conditions are more likely to have complications and being hospitalised from flu. These medical conditions include:

- > cardiac disease
- > chronic respiratory conditions (including severe asthma)
- > chronic neurological conditions that impact respiratory function (including hereditary and degenerative central nervous system diseases and seizure disorders)
- > immunocompromising conditions (including immunocompromised due to disease or treatment)
- > diabetes and other metabolic disorders
- > renal disease
- > haematological disorders (including haemoglobinopathies)
- > children aged six months to 10 years on long term aspirin therapy who are at increased risk of Reye syndrome following influenza infection.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 6 months of age and over

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at high risk of complications and being hospitalised from flu.

Children aged 6 months to less than 5 years of age

In 2022, children younger than 5 years of age had the second highest number of flu cases compared to other age groups.

Babies and children younger than 5 years of age have a high risk of complications and being hospitalised from flu. This applies to all children in this age group, not just those with medical conditions.

Children with flu may spread the virus to others for up to two weeks.

If it is the first time children less than 9 years of age are having a flu vaccine, they should have two doses at least four weeks apart.

Adults aged 65 years or over

Adults over 65 are more likely to be hospitalised and affected by complications from flu, such as pneumonia.

This age group receives a flu vaccine made specifically to boost the immune response for better protection.

People experiencing homelessness

People experiencing homelessness are at higher risk of complications of flu and spreading flu.

People experiencing homelessness can include those living in:

- > improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping rough
- > supported accommodation for the homeless
- > boarding houses or other temporary lodging
- > severely crowded dwellings.

Where can I get my free vaccine?

You can get the free vaccine from a range of immunisation providers including your GP, Aboriginal Health Service, some pharmacies and some local council and community clinics. Some people, especially children, may be able to have their flu vaccine while in hospital or at a follow up hospital appointment.

Talk to your doctor, nurse or immunisation provider to arrange for your free flu vaccine.

How can I check if I am eligible for free flu vaccine?

Talk to your GP or immunisation provider or visit sahealth.sa.gov.au/flu to find out if you are, or your child, is eligible.

How can I get vaccinated if I am not eligible for a free vaccine?

If you are not eligible to receive a free flu vaccine, you can purchase the vaccine. Either see your GP or check whether your local council clinic or pharmacy has flu vaccines available for purchase.

Talk to your immunisation provider to find out how much it will cost and to arrange an appointment.

Some employers and organisations provide the flu vaccine for their employees and volunteers. Speak to your manager to find out if this may apply to your workplace.

When will the flu vaccine be available?

Funded flu vaccine availability varies depending on when the vaccine is available from manufacturers and the Commonwealth Government. Several brands of the flu vaccine from different manufacturers become available at different times.

Check with your immunisation provider to find out when they will have the vaccine available and when you will be able to book in to have the vaccine.

When is the best time to have the flu vaccine?

Having the flu vaccine in autumn each year provides the best protection during the peak flu season, which is usually June to September in most parts of Australia.

However, flu infections occur throughout the year so the flu vaccine can be given at any time during the year while the vaccine is available.

Talk to your doctor or immunisation provider about the best time for you to have the vaccine and how to arrange it.

Does the flu vaccine work right away?

It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against infection. That's why it's best to get vaccinated before flu viruses start to spread in your community.

Is one brand of flu vaccine better than another?

All flu vaccines used in Australia for the annual funded program are approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and contain the same flu virus strains. Different vaccines are approved for specific age groups. It is important that adults and children have the correct vaccine for their age group.

How many doses of flu vaccine are needed?

One flu vaccine per year is routinely recommended for most people. Children under 9 years of age who get the flu vaccine for the first time are recommended to have two doses at least four weeks apart to improve their immune response. If a child received at least one flu vaccine in a previous year, they only need one dose in the following years.

Some people with certain immune compromising conditions may also need two doses at least four weeks apart. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you are not sure if you, or your child, need a second dose of flu vaccine.

Is the flu vaccine safe?

Yes. All vaccines in Australia must be registered with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA evaluates all vaccines to ensure they are safe and effective.

Most vaccines can cause common, mild, and short-lasting side effects for some people. Generally, common side effects, such as fever, headache, muscle aches, soreness and swelling at the injection site begin within a few hours. These may last one to two days and go away without any treatment. Severe allergic reactions are very rare.

What ingredients are in the flu vaccine?

Flu vaccines contain various ingredients that work together to ensure that the vaccine is safe and effective. The specific ingredients vary slightly among vaccines.

Ingredients often include inactive flu viruses, chemicals that boost the body's response to the vaccine, preservatives to prevent contamination, and stabilisers.

Can I get flu from the flu vaccine?

You cannot get flu from the vaccine because it does not contain any live flu virus.

Can I have the flu vaccine if I am allergic to eggs?

It is safe for people with an egg allergy to have a flu vaccine even if the allergy is severe. You do not have to be vaccinated in a hospital. Talk to your doctor or immunisation provider about any allergies you have before having a flu vaccine.

Will the flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

The flu vaccine does not protect against COVID-19. The flu vaccine will help reduce the severity and spread of flu. People should stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations to protect themselves from COVID-19.

Can I have the flu vaccine at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccine?

A flu vaccine can be given safely at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccine. Speak to your GP for more information.

Do I need a flu vaccine to enter a residential aged care facility?

Visitors to residential aged care facilities are no longer required to be vaccinated against flu or COVID-19. For more information, visit sahealth.sa.gov.au/covidagedcare.

Where can I get more information?

For more information, visit:

- > SA Health sahealth.sa.gov.au/flu
- > Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care health.gov.au/immunisation
- > National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance ncirs.edu.au.

For more information

Immunisation Section
Communicable Disease Control Branch
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation
Telephone: 1300 232 272
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

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