

Influenza 'Flu' Vaccination in 2020

Why do I need the Flu Vaccine?

In this year alone, CDC* figures show that in the U.S. alone, the flu has caused an estimated 36 million illnesses, 370,000 hospitalizations and 22,000 deaths in 2020. With the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic, influenza vaccination is an effective and vital measure to reduce the overload on our hospital systems. ***This year it is more important than ever that all our patients plus their close contacts be vaccinated*** even if you are following social isolation and adequate hand hygiene.

Who should get the flu vaccine?

All Australians over 6 months should be vaccinated yearly for the flu.

When will the vaccine be available?

As of March 2020, some pharmacies have already received stock of vaccines. The funded NIP vaccine supply is scheduled to be available in April (subject to local supply arrangements).

When is the best time to get the vaccination?

Ideally April. Peak protection against the flu occurs within the first 3-4 months of the vaccination. Australia's peak flu period is usually June to September. Vaccination should begin from April at the latest.

If I can get in early, should I get a vaccination?

If you are immune suppressed, then yes, but we may recommend that you get a second dose of the vaccination (for which you may be required to pay) one month later. Discuss this with your Haematologist.

Which vaccination should I receive?

This year, all vaccines available are Quadrivalent (cover the 4 major strains of influenza).

The dose is 0.5ml (the previously available 0.25mg for younger children is no longer available).

For patients ≥ 65 years the preferred version is Flud[®] Quad. We would prefer this for our younger immune compromised patients as well.

Do I need a second vaccination?

In general, revaccination is not recommended however for our immune compromised patients, and for those who received their first dose very early in the season (March 2020) a second vaccination may be recommended by your Haematologist. Discuss this at your visit/telehealth consultation.

Do I need to pay?

Not always. Free (funded) vaccination is available to the following groups due to their high risk of complications of influenza:

- All people aged 6 months to less than 5 years (this cohort is newly eligible in 2020)
- All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over
- Pregnant women (during any stage of pregnancy)
- All people aged 65 years and over
- People aged 6 months and over with medical conditions which increase the risk of influenza disease complications.
- People with the following serious medical conditions:**

Table 2. Medical conditions associated with an increased risk of influenza disease complications and for which individuals are eligible for free vaccination under the NIP*

Category	Vaccination strongly recommended for individuals with the following conditions
Cardiac disease	Cyanotic congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure, coronary artery disease
Chronic respiratory conditions	Severe asthma, cystic fibrosis, bronchiectasis, suppurative lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, chronic emphysema
Chronic neurological conditions	Hereditary and degenerative CNS diseases, seizure disorders, spinal cord injuries, neuromuscular disorders
Immunocompromising conditions	Immunocompromised due to disease or treatment, asplenia or splenic dysfunction, HIV infection
Diabetes and other metabolic disorders	Type 1 or 2 diabetes, chronic metabolic disorders
Renal disease	Chronic renal failure
Haematological disorders	Haemoglobinopathies
Long-term aspirin therapy in children aged 6 months to 10 years	These children are at increased risk of Reye syndrome following influenza infection

* Please refer to The Australian Immunisation Handbook available at immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au for advice on persons who are strongly recommended to receive annual influenza vaccination but not eligible for NIP-funded influenza vaccines.

People not falling in these categories may need to pay for their vaccination. This is not an expensive item and is seen as crucial for all Australians over the age of 6 months of age.

* CDC – US Centres for Disease Control 2020

**Aust Govt Dept of Health Publication - Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation: March 2020