



Australian Government  
Department of Health



A joint Australian, State and Territory Government initiative

# GET THE FLU SHOT BEFORE THE FLU GETS YOU

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO VACCINATE

## CONSUMER FACT SHEET

- ✔ Vaccination is the single most effective way of preventing the spread of flu in the community.
- ✔ If you want to protect yourself from the flu, get vaccinated every year because the flu virus is constantly changing.
- ✔ The flu vaccine is available free under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) from April 2017 for those people who have the greatest risk of becoming severely ill from flu. Receiving the vaccine from April allows protection from the flu to develop well ahead of the peak transmission period, which usually falls around August.
- ✔ Children can receive the flu vaccine from the age of six months.
- ✔ Parents should tell their doctor the age of their child before vaccination as flu vaccines are age-specific.

### WHAT IS THE FLU?

Influenza (flu) is a highly contagious viral infection that spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing and close contact.

The flu virus infects your nose, throat and sometimes your lungs. Unlike a cold, symptoms such as fever, sore throat and muscle aches develop suddenly with flu and last about a week. In some cases, severe illness and complications such as pneumonia and bronchitis can develop, which can result in hospitalisation and even death. The flu can also make some existing medical conditions worse.

### WHY SHOULD I GET THE FLU SHOT?

Annual vaccination is the best way of preventing the flu and any associated illness.

You should get the flu shot every year because the flu virus is constantly changing. Every year, the flu vaccine changes to match the flu virus, so it protects against the flu strains which are most likely to be around during that winter.

There is evidence that the effectiveness of the influenza vaccine wanes over time and it's important to be protected when the flu is most common, around August. Ask your doctor for advice on the best time to receive your vaccination.

### WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE FREE FLU SHOT?

Vaccination experts recommend the flu vaccine for everyone from six months of age. However, the vaccine is free under the National Immunisation Program for people at high risk of complications. They are:

#### **Pregnant women**

Pregnant women are at higher risk of severe complications associated with the flu. Vaccinating against flu at any stage during pregnancy is safe and also provides some protection for babies during their first, vulnerable months of life.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from six months to less than five years of age, and 15 years of age and over, are eligible for free flu shots.

### People 65 years and over

People aged 65 years and over have the highest risk of complications associated with seasonal flu.

### People with certain medical conditions

People with some existing medical conditions are more likely to experience complications from flu. These include anyone who is six months of age and over who has:

- ✔ heart disease
- ✔ severe asthma<sup>1</sup>
- ✔ chronic lung condition
- ✔ chronic illness requiring medical follow-up or hospitalisation in the past year
- ✔ diseases of the nervous system
- ✔ impaired immunity
- ✔ diabetes
- ✔ children aged six months to 10 years on long-term aspirin therapy.

### FLU VACCINE FOR CHILDREN

The flu vaccines are age-specific. Make sure your vaccination provider knows how old your child is so they can receive the correct dose and brand of vaccine.

If your child is under nine years and they have not received the flu vaccine before, they should have two doses at least four weeks apart the first year they receive it.

### FLU VACCINE SAFETY

Common side effects usually occur within one to two days following flu vaccination and include soreness, redness, pain and swelling at the injection site, drowsiness, tiredness, muscle aches and low grade fever. If these side effects occur they are usually mild and go away within a few days, usually without any treatment.

There may be a small increase in the risk of fever when a child receives both the flu vaccine and the pneumococcal

disease vaccine (Prevenar 13) at the same time. These two vaccines can be given separately, with at least a three day interval between them, to reduce the likelihood of fever. If you are concerned, you should discuss this option with your doctor or vaccination provider.

People with an egg allergy, including anaphylaxis, can be safely vaccinated with influenza vaccines.

People with a history of anaphylaxis to egg can be vaccinated with a full vaccine dose in medical facilities with staff experienced in recognising and treating anaphylaxis.

The flu vaccine does not contain any live virus, so you cannot get the flu from the vaccine.

You are encouraged to report any adverse event following the flu vaccine to your doctor or vaccination provider, to the Adverse Medicines Events Line on 1300 134 237, or to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) through the 'Report a problem' link on the TGA website.

### WHERE CAN I GET THE FLU SHOT?

Vaccines are available from April 2017. Talk to your doctor, Aboriginal Health Worker or nurse about your flu shot.

### CONTACT LIST

State and territory contact numbers:

<b>ACT</b>	02 6205 2300
<b>NSW</b>	1300 066 055
<b>NT</b>	08 8922 8044
<b>WA</b>	08 9321 1312
<b>SA</b>	1300 232 272
<b>TAS</b>	1800 671 738
<b>VIC</b>	1300 882 008
<b>QLD</b>	13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)

For more information about the 2017 seasonal influenza vaccine, visit [immunise.health.gov.au](http://immunise.health.gov.au) or call the Immunise Australia information line: 1800 671 811.

All information in this fact sheet is correct as at 18 March 2017 and valid for the 2017 influenza season.

<sup>1</sup> Severe asthma requiring frequent hospital visits and the use of multiple medications, for more information see *The Australian Immunisation Handbook 10th edition* or visit [immunise.health.gov.au](http://immunise.health.gov.au).

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2017 FLU SHOT AVAILABLE NOW

**FACT SHEET FLU SEASON 2017**