



Fact sheet for consumers

FLU SEASON 2015



The Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Program begins on 20 April 2015.

WHAT IS THE FLU?

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, spreads easily from person to person through infected droplets in the air and by hands. Vaccination is the single most effective way of preventing and stopping its spread.

The flu virus infects your nose, throat and sometimes your lungs. It is different from a cold as symptoms such as fever, sore throat and muscle aches develop suddenly and last about a week. In some cases, severe illness and complications such as pneumonia and bronchitis can develop, resulting in hospitalisation and/or death. The flu can also make some existing medical conditions worse.

WHY SHOULD I GET THE FLU SHOT?

Because the flu virus is constantly changing, you need to get vaccinated every year.

Every year, the flu vaccine changes too, so it protects against the three strains of flu virus which are most likely to be around during that winter. You should be vaccinated in autumn to allow time for the vaccine to work before the flu season starts. Even if you received a flu shot towards the end of the last flu season, you should still be vaccinated again before this flu season.

The flu vaccine does not contain any live virus therefore you cannot get flu from receiving the vaccine.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE FREE FLU SHOT?

The flu vaccine is recommended for everyone from six months of age but is available free under the National Immunisation Program for people at high risk of complications. They are:

Pregnant Women

The flu vaccine is recommended for pregnant women and can be safely given during any stage of pregnancy. Pregnant women are at higher risk of severe complications associated with the flu. Vaccinating against flu during pregnancy also provides protection for babies during their first vulnerable months of life.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Persons

Influenza is a major cause of preventable sickness and death amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons 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 Medically at Risk

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.
- 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 SAFETY AND ALLERGIES

Vaccines, like other medicines, can have side effects, however the majority of side effects are minor.

Common side effects following flu vaccination include soreness, redness, pain and swelling at the injection site, drowsiness, tiredness, muscle aches and low grade temperature (fever). These side effects are usually mild and go away within a few days, usually without any treatment. You should contact your doctor if you are concerned or your child has a persistent high temperature.

There may be a small increase in the risk of fever when a child receives both the flu vaccine and the pneumococcal disease vaccine (13vPCV) at the same time. These two vaccines can be given separately, with a 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 immunisation provider.

Australia has rigorous systems in place to monitor adverse events following vaccination to ensure the ongoing safety of the National Immunisation Program.

Serious reactions to immunisation are very rare, however if they do occur consult your doctor, or your state/territory health authority immediately (see contact numbers below). Immunisation providers should report adverse events following immunisation to their relevant state/territory health authority where it is mandatory reporting, and to the Therapeutic Goods Administration if there are no mandatory reporting requirements in place.



For more information about the 2015 seasonal influenza vaccine, visit immunise.health.gov.au or call the Immunise Australia Information line: **1800 671 811**



IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT THE FLU SHOT

- Flu vaccinations are the single most effective way of helping fight the spread of flu in the community.
- Vaccines are available from 20 April 2015 from GP surgeries and other immunisation providers. Check with your local council, community and/or Aboriginal Health Services.
- Approximately 3,000 Australians die every year, either directly from the seasonal flu, complications due to the flu, or pneumonia.
- If you are a person at high risk, talk with your doctor or immunisation provider about getting the free flu vaccine.

CONTACT LIST

State and Territory contact information

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

All information in this fact sheet is correct as at March 2015 and valid for the 2015 influenza season.