

Patient Information Sheet: 2023 Influenza Vaccinations

Your GP or nurse will have given you this information sheet to help you choose which influenza vaccine is the best for you. They will discuss the options with you, so please speak with them if you have any questions.

Who should get vaccinated against influenza?

Yearly influenza vaccination is recommended for people aged 6 months and over. Anyone who wants to protect themselves against influenza can talk to their GP about getting vaccinated.

The influenza vaccine is **free under the National Immunisation Program (NIP)** for:

- Children aged 6 months to under 5 years
- All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over
- People aged 5 years or over who have medical conditions that mean they have a higher risk of getting seriously unwell, such as:
 - cardiac disease
 - chronic respiratory conditions
 - chronic neurological conditions
 - immunocompromising conditions
 - diabetes and other metabolic disorders
 - renal disease
 - haematological disorders
 - children aged six months to 10 years on long-term aspirin therapy.
- Pregnant women (at any stage of pregnancy)
- People aged 65 years or over.

Your GP or practice nurse can advise if you or your child have a specified medical risk condition.

Please be advised that children under nine years receiving their influenza vaccination for the first time require two doses of vaccine, spaced by a minimum of one month. Please let your GP or nurse know if this is your child's first flu vaccination, and the second dose can be scheduled.

Patients who are not eligible for a free vaccine can purchase the vaccine from their vaccination provider.

What about people with allergies?

The egg-based influenza vaccines contain only minute traces of egg protein. People with egg allergy, including a history of anaphylaxis, can be vaccinated with these influenza vaccines. If you have an egg allergy, please discuss this with your immunisation provider. There is now an egg-free option; however, it is currently not available on the NIP and is available to purchase at our clinic. If you have any questions, please ask your GP or nurse.

***** People should not receive the influenza vaccine if they have experienced anaphylaxis after a previous dose of any influenza vaccine. *****

How do I get vaccinated against influenza?

Influenza vaccines come as a single vaccine that covers four strains of this year's flu virus. It is given as a needle, usually in the upper arm. It is important to get the right vaccine for your age. This is particularly relevant to children (6 months to 9 years) and those over 65. Your GP or nurse can tell you which vaccine they would recommend for you or your child's influenza vaccination.

What are the potential side effects?

The viruses in a flu shot are killed (inactivated), so you cannot get flu from a flu shot. Some minor side effects that may occur are soreness, redness, and/or swelling where the injection was given, headache (low grade), fever, muscle aches, nausea, or fatigue. If these problems occur, they begin soon after vaccination and usually are mild and short-lived. A flu shot, like other injections, can occasionally cause fainting. Tell your provider if you feel dizzy



or have vision changes or ringing in the ears. As with any medicine, there is a very remote chance of a vaccine causing a severe allergic reaction, other serious injury, or death.

Do I have a choice of influenza vaccines?

Like COVID-19 vaccines, there are different types of flu vaccines to choose from. Please read the below to help you choose the best vaccine for you. There are two main flu vaccine technologies; egg-based and cell-based vaccines.

- **Egg-based Flu Vaccines**

All available flu vaccines, except one, are made using an egg-based manufacturing process that has been used for over 70 years. There are only minute traces of egg protein, and people with egg allergy, including a history of anaphylaxis, can be vaccinated with these influenza vaccines. If you have any questions about egg-based flu vaccines, please ask your GP or nurse.

- **Cell-based Flu Vaccines (new)**

The flu viruses used in the cell-based vaccines are grown in cultured cells of mammalian origin instead of in hen's eggs. Cell culture technology has been used to produce other licensed vaccines, including for rotavirus, polio, smallpox, hepatitis, rubella and chickenpox. The cell-based vaccines are not government-funded but are available to purchase at our clinic. If you have any questions about cell-based flu vaccines, please ask your GP or nurse.

Do I need to choose which vaccine I'd like before my appointment?

No, you can discuss this with your GP or nurse during your appointment. There are government-funded and private flu vaccines available at the clinic.

Are you over 65?

All patients 65 years and older are entitled to government-funded vaccines through the NIP as they are more likely to be hospitalised and affected by complications from influenza, such as pneumonia. This age group receives a government-funded influenza vaccine made specifically to boost the immune response for better protection.

Where can I find more information?

More information about the NIP can be found on the Australian Government's Department of Health and Aged Care website at <https://www.health.gov.au/topics/immunisation/vaccines/influenza-flu-vaccine>