FLU VACCINE FACTS

What is flu?

Influenza or 'flu' is a highly contagious infection caused by the influenza virus. The virus is spread when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes small droplets into the air, where they may be breathed in by people nearby. Infection may also be spread by contact with contaminated hands, tissues and other infected articles.

Flu infection can cause serious illness and complications, especially in young children, pregnant women and older people. Infection can be more severe when people have other existing medical conditions, such as diabetes, breathing or heart problems. Flu infection causes hospital stays and deaths every year.

After the vaccination, it is still possible to get flu but it will usually be much milder.

Why have the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine helps your body to develop immunity without you getting the flu. The flu vaccine contains several inactivated strains to protect against the most commonly circulating flu viruses each year.

Who should receive the flu vaccine?

The seasonal flu vaccine is recommended for anyone aged 6 months and over to reduce the likelihood of getting flu.

It is especially important for people at increased risk of complications from flu.

People eligible for free vaccine include:

- all children from 6 months to less than 5 years of age
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over
- pregnant people in any trimester
- those aged 65 years and over
- those with chronic medical conditions (check with your doctor or nurse)
- people experiencing homelessness.

How often should I receive the flu vaccine?

As the flu virus changes frequently, the vaccine must be given each year to offer the best protection.

Children under 9 years of age, and those with a lowered immune system, should have two doses of the vaccine at least one month apart when getting the flu vaccine for the first time.

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When should I be vaccinated?

The best time to vaccinate is autumn, but flu vaccine can be given at any time during the year while vaccine is available. It usually takes up to two weeks for the flu vaccine to provide protection.

Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or immunisation provider about the best time for you to have the vaccine.

Are flu vaccines safe?

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) evaluates and registers all vaccines in Australia to ensure they are safe and effective.

Where can I get vaccinated?

If you are eligible for a free vaccine, contact your immunisation provider to make an appointment. The vaccine is free but some providers may charge a fee for their service. Ask about fees when making an appointment.

If you are not eligible for a free vaccine, check whether your doctor, local immunisation clinic or pharmacy has the flu vaccine available for purchase.

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

It is safe for people with an egg allergy to have flu vaccine even if the allergy is severe. You do not have to be vaccinated in a hospital.

Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or immunisation provider about any allergies you have before having the flu vaccine.

Are there any side effects?

Most side effects are minor, last a short time and resolve without any treatment. Generally, common reactions such as fever, headache, muscle aches and soreness at the injection site begin within a few hours as the immune system starts to respond to the vaccine and last for one to two days.

More serious reactions are rare. All unexpected side effects should be reported to your doctor, immunisation provider or the Immunisation Section, SA Health.

For more information

Immunisation Section,
Communicable Disease Control Branch,
SA Health
T: 1300 232 272
sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation

References

Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian Government Department of Health, Canberra, 2024: immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au

National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance ncirs.edu.au

ASK ABOUT YOUR FREE FLU VACCINE TODAY

Interpreter

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