

## Consumer Frequently Asked Questions

# 2021 Funded Annual Influenza Program

### How can I protect myself and my family from the flu?

Influenza (commonly known as the flu), is an infection of the nose, throat and sometimes lungs caused by flu viruses. It spreads very easily and quickly between people through coughing, talking, sneezing and contact with contaminated hands, tissues and other infected items. The flu can cause serious illness and complications for anyone, but some groups of people are at even higher risk of serious flu infection, complications and hospitalisation.

### How can I protect myself and my family from the flu?

The best way to protect yourself and your family is to have the flu vaccine every year. Flu viruses change over time, so a new flu vaccine is made for each year. Flu vaccination is recommended for anyone aged 6 months and over to reduce the chance of becoming ill with the flu. For some people the vaccine is funded (free).

### What is the Funded Influenza Program?

The flu vaccine is provided free under the nationally funded influenza program and South Australian state funded program. The free vaccines are for people who are most likely to be affected by serious illness and complications from the flu. This includes pregnant women, people with certain medical conditions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people who are experiencing homelessness, older adults and young children.

Talk to your doctor if you are not sure whether you, or a family member, can have a free vaccine.

### Why do some people get a free vaccine?

Some groups of people are more likely to be seriously affected by the flu and suffer more complications and hospitalisations than others, so people in these high risk groups are provided with free flu vaccine.

### Who can have the free vaccine?

#### **Pregnant women**

- > Women who have flu infection late in the pregnancy are more likely to have complications or have a preterm baby
- > Vaccinating pregnant women also helps protect their babies in the first few months when they are too young to be vaccinated themselves, and are at high risk of serious complications and hospitalisation from the flu
- > Pregnant women who had the 2020 flu vaccine early in their pregnancy, can have the 2021 flu vaccine if it is available before their baby is born

#### **People 6 months of age, or over, with certain medical conditions**

People with certain medical conditions are more likely to have complications from the flu so are eligible to have a free flu vaccine. These medical conditions include:



- > heart disease or chronic lung conditions;
- > severe asthma (those who need frequent GP visits or multiple medications);
- > nervous system diseases, which may affect breathing, e.g. Multiple Sclerosis;
- > diabetes or kidney disease;
- > lowered immunity, either due to disease or treatment, e.g. cancer or rheumatoid arthritis treatment;
- > certain blood disorders; and
- > children taking aspirin long term.

#### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people 6 months of age and older**

- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at high risk of complications and being hospitalised from the flu

#### **Children aged 6 months to less than 5 years of age**

- > Babies and children younger than 5 years of age have a high risk of complications and being hospitalised from the flu. This applies to all children in this age group, not just those with medical conditions
- > Children with the flu may spread the virus to others for up to two weeks
- > If it is the first time children less than 9 years of age are having a flu vaccine, they should have two doses at least four weeks apart

#### **Adults aged 65 years or older**

- > Adults over 65 are more likely to be hospitalised and affected by flu complications, such as pneumonia
- > This age group receives a flu vaccine made specifically to boost the immune response for better protection

#### **People who are experiencing homelessness**

- > People who are experiencing homelessness are at higher risk of complications of flu and spreading the flu
- > People who are experiencing homelessness include those living in improvised dwellings, tents, or sleeping rough, living in supported accommodation for the homeless, living in boarding houses or other temporary lodging, or living in severely crowded dwellings

### **Where can I get my free vaccine?**

You can get the free vaccine from a range of immunisation providers including your GP, Aboriginal Health Service and some local council and community clinics. Some people, especially children, may be able to have their flu vaccine while in hospital or at a follow up hospital appointment.

Talk to your doctor, nurse or immunisation provider to arrange for your free flu vaccine.

### **I am not sure if I am eligible for free flu vaccine. What should I do?**

Talk to your GP or immunisation provider or visit [sahealth.sa.gov.au/flu](http://sahealth.sa.gov.au/flu) to find out if you or your child is able to have a free flu vaccine.

## How can I get vaccinated if I am not eligible for a free vaccine?

If you are not eligible to receive a free flu vaccine, you can pay to have the vaccine. Either see your GP or check whether your local council clinic or pharmacy has flu vaccines available for purchase.

Talk to your immunisation provider to find out how much it will cost and to arrange an appointment.

Some employers and organisations pay to provide the flu vaccine for their employees and volunteers. Speak to your manager to find out if this may apply to you in your workplace.

## When will the flu vaccine be available?

Funded flu vaccine availability varies depending on when the vaccine is available from manufacturers and the Commonwealth government.

Several brands of the flu vaccine from different manufacturers are used and they become available at different times. Some flu vaccines are used only in the funded program, some are used only for private programs and others may be used for both funded and private programs.

When adequate stocks are available, funded flu vaccines are distributed to immunisation providers using the established South Australian vaccine distribution system. Privately purchased flu vaccine supplies are arranged by the providers that use them and may be available at a different time than funded flu vaccines.

Check with your immunisation provider to find out when they will have the vaccine available and when you will be able to book in to have the vaccine.

## When is the best time to have the flu vaccine?

Having the flu vaccine from April each year provides the best protection during the peak flu season, which is usually June to September in most parts of Australia.

However, flu infections occur throughout the year so the flu vaccine can be given at any time during the year while the vaccine is available.

Talk to your doctor or immunisation provider about the best time for you to have the vaccine and how to arrange it.

## Is one brand of flu vaccine better than another?

No. All flu vaccines used in Australia are approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and contain the same flu virus strains. Different vaccines are approved for specific age groups. It is important that adults and children have the correct vaccine for their age group.

## How many doses of flu vaccine are needed?

One flu vaccine per year is routinely recommended for most people. Children under 9 years of age who get the flu vaccine for the first time are recommended to have two doses at least four weeks apart to improve their immune response. If a child received at least one flu vaccine in a previous year, they only need one dose in the following years.

Some people with certain immune compromising conditions may also need two doses at least four weeks apart. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you are not sure if you, or your child, need a second dose of flu vaccine.

## Is the flu vaccine safe?

Yes. All vaccines in Australia must be registered with the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA evaluates all vaccines to ensure they are safe and effective.

Most vaccines can cause mild, and short lasting side effects for some people. Generally, common side effects, such as fever, headache, muscle aches, soreness and swelling at the injection site begin within a few hours. These may last 1-2 days and go away without any treatment. Severe allergic reactions are very rare.

## Can I get the flu from the flu vaccine?

You cannot get the flu from the vaccine because it does not contain any live flu virus.

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

Yes. 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 or immunisation provider about any allergies that you have before having the flu vaccine.

## Will the flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

The flu vaccine does not protect against COVID-19. The flu vaccine will help reduce the severity and spread of the flu.

## Can I have the flu vaccine at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccine?

For most people, the recommended minimum interval between the COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines (including influenza vaccine) is seven days, but can be shortened (including same day administration) in special circumstances. Speak to your GP for more information.

## Do I need a flu vaccine to enter an aged care facility?

By 1 June 2021 all staff and visitors to an aged care facility must be vaccinated against 2021 seasonal influenza. Existing exemption criteria continue to apply.

## Where can I get more information?

- > SA Health: Influenza – [sahealth.sa.gov.au/flu](https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/flu)
- > Australian Government Department of Health: [health.gov.au/immunisation](https://www.health.gov.au/immunisation)
- > National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance: [ncirs.edu.au](https://www.ncirs.edu.au)

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## For more information

**Immunisation Section**  
**Communicable Disease Control Branch**  
[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation](https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation)  
**Telephone: 1300 232 272**  
[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)

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