

Frequently Asked Questions

2022 Funded Annual Influenza Program

How can I protect myself and my family from influenza?

Influenza (commonly known as the flu), is an infection of the nose, throat and sometimes lungs caused by influenza viruses. It spreads very easily and quickly between people through coughing, talking, sneezing and contact with contaminated hands, tissues and other infected items. Influenza 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.

What is the Influenza Vaccine?

The influenza vaccine is an inactivated vaccine. An inactivated vaccine contains parts of the virus which has been inactivated. The inactivated virus cannot reproduce itself or cause disease. The advantage of vaccines produced in this way is that the body still recognises the virus and produces an immune response.

Strains of Influenza

Influenza is caused by influenza viruses classified as type A, B or C. Only influenza A and B viruses are included in seasonal influenza vaccines as they cause the majority of disease in humans.

The strains used in seasonal influenza vaccines can change from year to year depending on which viruses are predicted to circulate in each upcoming season.

How can I protect myself and my family from influenza?

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

What is the Funded Influenza Program?

The influenza 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 influenza. 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 influenza and suffer more complications and hospitalisations than others, so people in these high risk groups are provided with free influenza vaccine.



Who can have the free vaccine?

Pregnant women

- > Women who have influenza 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 influenza
- > Pregnant women who had the 2021 influenza vaccine early in their pregnancy, are recommended to have the 2022 influenza 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 influenza so are eligible to have a free influenza 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 Islander people 6 months of age and older

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

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 influenza. This applies to all children in this age group, not just those with medical conditions
- > Children with influenza 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 an influenza 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 complications from influenza, such as pneumonia
- > This age group receives an influenza 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 influenza and spreading influenza
- > 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, some pharmacies and some local council and community clinics. Some people, especially children, may be able to have their influenza vaccine while in hospital or at a follow up hospital appointment.

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

I am not sure if I am eligible for free influenza vaccine. What should I do?

Talk to your GP or immunisation provider or visit sahealth.sa.gov.au/flu to find out if you or your child is eligible.

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

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

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

Several brands of the influenza vaccine from different manufacturers are used and they become available at different times. Some influenza 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 influenza vaccines are distributed to immunisation providers using the established South Australian vaccine distribution system. Privately purchased influenza vaccine supplies are arranged by the providers that use them and may be available at a different time than funded influenza 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 influenza vaccine?

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

However, influenza infections occur throughout the year so the influenza 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.

Does the influenza vaccine work right away?

No. It takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection. That's why it's best to get vaccinated before influenza viruses start to spread in your community.

Is one brand of influenza vaccine better than another?

No. All influenza vaccines used in Australia for the annual funded influenza program are approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and contain the same influenza 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 influenza vaccine are needed?

One influenza vaccine per year is routinely recommended for most people. Children under 9 years of age who get the influenza 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 influenza 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 influenza vaccine.

Is the influenza 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.

Ingredients

Influenza vaccines contain various ingredients that work together to ensure that the vaccine is safe and effective. The specific ingredients vary slightly among vaccines.

Ingredients often include deactivated influenza viruses, chemicals that boost the body's response to the vaccine, preservatives to prevent contamination, and stabilizers.

Can I get influenza from the influenza vaccine?

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

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

Yes. It is safe for people with an egg allergy to have influenza 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 influenza vaccine.

Will the influenza vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

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

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

The current advice from ATAGI is that an influenza vaccine can be given safely at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccine. Speak to your GP for more information.

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

Yes. All staff and visitors to an aged care facility must be vaccinated against seasonal influenza. Existing exemption criteria continue to apply.

More information on visiting a residential aged care facility, go to www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/COVID-19.

Where can I get more information?

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

For more information

Immunisation Section
Communicable Disease Control Branch
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation
Telephone: 1300 232 272
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

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