

Influenza FAQs

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly called “the flu”, is a contagious disease caused by a virus which spreads easily from person to person. Compared with other viral respiratory infections such as the common cold, influenza infection can cause severe illness and can also precipitate serious and life-threatening complications. Influenza viruses infect many parts of the body, including the nose, throat and lungs. Influenza symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, runny nose and watery eyes. Although the fever and body aches usually last for 3 – 5 days, coughing and fatigue can persist for two weeks or more.

What vaccines do we use this year?

AVS in line with the National Immunisation Program (NIP) offer the egg-based influenza vaccine. Cell based vaccines are available from some pharmacies or your local GP.

For the 2026 influenza season, the vaccine used in Australia is a trivalent vaccine. This change reflects the removal of the B/Yamagata lineage, which has not been detected globally since the COVID-19 pandemic. The vaccine composition is aligned with World Health Organization recommendations and approved for use in Australia by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

The 2026 southern hemisphere influenza season contains the following

- an A/Missouri/11/2025 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Singapore/GP20238/2024 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus.

How does the vaccine work?

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine. The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season.

What are the benefits of flu vaccinations?

Flu vaccinations can keep you from getting sick from flu. Protecting yourself from flu also protects the people around you who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness.

Flu vaccinations can help protect people who are at greater risk of getting seriously ill from flu, like older adults, people with chronic health conditions and young children including infants younger than 6 months old who are too young to get vaccinated.

Flu vaccinations reduce the risk severe complications including hospitalisations and deaths.

How effective is the influenza vaccine?

Vaccine effectiveness can vary from year to year, but it consistently reduces the risk of severe illness and hospitalisation. It takes approximately two weeks after vaccination for the body to develop protection against influenza.

Can I catch influenza from the vaccine?

You cannot get influenza from the vaccine. The influenza vaccine contains only inactivated (non-live) virus components, which cannot replicate in the body or spread through the respiratory system. As a result, they cannot cause influenza illness. The influenza vaccine only protects against influenza and does not prevent colds or other viral respiratory infections.

What are the possible side effects from the flu shot?

Common side effects following seasonal flu vaccinations include pain or swelling at injection site, occasionally a small lump, mild fever, tiredness or muscle aches. The side effects are usually mild and resolve within a few days, often quickly without treatment.

Reactions may occur within a few hours following vaccination and may last 1 to 2 days. Some severe allergic reactions can occur within 15 minutes which is why it is important to wait in the designated area for 15 minutes vaccination so the nurse can monitor for symptoms.

If you experience any serious symptoms after receiving the vaccine, please contact your doctor immediately.

Why do I need to get vaccinated against the flu every year?

There are two main reasons for getting a yearly flu vaccine:

- Flu viruses frequently change, and vaccines may be updated each season to protect against the most common circulating strains.
- A person's immune protection from influenza vaccination declines over time so annual vaccination is recommended.

Is it safe for me to get the flu shot if I am pregnant?

Yes, the flu vaccine can be safely given during any stage of pregnancy. Pregnant women are at increased risk of severe disease or complications from the flu. Vaccination during pregnancy not only protects the mother but also provides ongoing protection to a newborn for the first six months after birth.

If you have any doubts, please speak to your doctor to confirm it's safe for you

What is the difference between egg based and cell-based flu vaccines?

Egg based and cell-based flu vaccines both protect against influenza, but they differ in how the vaccine virus is grown during manufacturing.

Egg based flu vaccines are made by growing the influenza virus in chicken eggs, then treating it so it cannot cause illness. This method has been used safely for many decades and is the most common way flu vaccines are made in Australia. While tiny traces of egg protein may remain, Australian health authorities advise that people with egg allergy, including those with severe reactions, can safely receive the flu vaccine.

Cell based flu vaccines are produced using mammalian cell cultures rather than eggs. The virus is grown, inactivated, and eggs are not used so no egg protein is present. They are made by growing the influenza virus in mammalian cells rather than eggs. In Australia, expert advisory bodies do not currently recommend one over the other for the general population. More information can be found [here](#).

Can everyone receive a flu vaccine?

If you have any of the following, please ensure you have discussed having a vaccine with your GP prior to booking in with us:

- If you have experienced anaphylaxis after a previous dose of influenza vaccine or to any component of the vaccine.
- If you have or have had Guillain-Barre syndrome after receiving a flu vaccine.
- If you take medicines that may reduce your immune response, such as corticosteroids, chemotherapy, radiotherapy.
- If you have moderate to severe illness with or without a fever.
- If you have an egg allergy, including anaphylaxis.

Is it safe for me to get the flu shot if I am pregnant?

The influenza vaccine is safe to receive at any stage of pregnancy. Pregnant women are at higher risk of severe illness and complications from influenza. Vaccination during pregnancy helps protect the mother and provides passive immunity to the newborn, offering protection during the first six months of life. If you have any concerns, speak with your doctor or healthcare provider for advice.

If I get a side effect after I have a flu vaccine, where can I report it?

You can report adverse events to us (AVS) on 02 8097 0753 and your doctor.

Side effects or adverse events following any immunisation can also be reported to the Therapeutic Goods Administration by calling the Adverse Medicine Events Line on 1300 134 237 or lodging a report online at the TGA website, via the 'report a problem link'.

AVS is eager to assist with this process as it is important to record adverse reactions.

What is the difference between quadrivalent and trivalent vaccines?

Quadrivalent influenza virus vaccines contain two subtypes of influenza A virus (an A(H1N1)pdm09 and an A(H3N2) virus) and two lineages of influenza B virus (a B/Victoria and a B/Yamagata lineage virus).

Trivalent influenza virus vaccines contain two subtypes of influenza A virus and one lineage of influenza B virus. More information can be found here:

<https://www.tga.gov.au/resources/publication/meeting-statements/aivc-recommendations-composition-in...>

Flu facts you may not know!

- The flu vaccine does not contain a live virus
- The vaccine formula is updated each year
- The flu vaccine is safe to receive at any stage of pregnancy

Why doesn't the vaccinator wipe my arm with alcohol first?

It is no longer necessary to wipe the arm with alcohol before vaccination unless the skin is visibly dirty. Your vaccinator will have already cleaned their hands prior to vaccination.

If I am travelling overseas, should I get this vaccination before I go?

It is generally recommended that all travellers get the influenza vaccine. Ideally get vaccinated at least 2 weeks before your trip to ensure full protection and to allow a few days in case of mild side effects.

I am under 18. Can I still have the vaccination at a workplace flu vaccination clinic?

If you are 16 years of age or older you may be vaccinated in the workplace, provided you have a valid consent form signed by a parent or guardian. If you are aged 18 years or older, you can sign the consent form yourself.

When can I drive after having the vaccination?

- You may drive when it has been 15 minutes since your flu vaccination and you feel well to do so.

What else can I do to avoid getting or spreading viral infections?

- Stay home from work and all other usual activities when you are feeling unwell with cold/flu symptoms;
- Maintain a social distance of 1.5m from others when in public spaces;
- Wear a face mask where physical distancing is not possible
- Observe cough etiquette - cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and dispose of the tissue in a rubbish bin Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, especially after you cough or sneeze;
- Regularly clean frequently touched surfaces such as desks, taps, and fridge doors
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as germs are commonly spread this way;
- Care for your immune system with a balanced diet, exercise and rest and managing your stress.

References:

- CDC (2022) Frequently asked Influenza (Flu) Questions: 2022-2023
- Australian Government Department of Health. Immunisation Handbook. Influenza Vaccine (Online version 2025)
- Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care (2025) Therapeutic Goods Administration. Influenza (flu) vaccines
- AIVC Recommendations for the Composition of Influenza Vaccines for Australia in 2025
- National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance Australia (NCIRS) 2026, Influenza vaccines – frequently asked questions