

# 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?

The influenza vaccine virus strains selected by the World Health Organisation for the 2025 Southern Hemisphere influenza season were chosen with the goals of providing the broadest possible coverage and making the vaccine more effective than the previous years vaccine. Quadrivalent influenza vaccines include two influenza type A and two influenza type B lineage virus. This is the same type of vaccine the Government is using as part of the National Program to fight influenza in Australia.

- an A/Victoria/4897/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Croatia/10136RV/2023 (H3N2)- like virus;
- a B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus;
- and B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus

## 3 things you might not know about the flu shot!

1. There is no live virus in the flu shot.
2. The composition of the vaccine changes every year.
3. The flu shot is safe for pregnant women at all stages of their pregnancy.

## How effective is the influenza vaccine?

The influenza vaccine provides a good level of protection which is 70% - 90% effective in healthy adults. It is important to know that it takes around two weeks after vaccination for a person to develop protection against influenza infection. Also, the influenza vaccine does not protect against respiratory illness caused by other viruses, such as the common cold.

## Can I catch influenza from the vaccine?

No. It is impossible to “catch” influenza from the vaccine. The influenza vaccine contains only “killed”, inactivated virus particles. Because the virus particles are not live, they cannot spread through your respiratory system or cause illness like the real 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.

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## What are the possible side effects from the flu shot?

Common side effects following seasonal flu vaccinations include soreness, fever, redness, pain and swelling at the injection site, vomiting and malaise.

These side effects are usually mild and resolve within a few days, usually quickly without any treatment.

Generally, reactions may occur within a few hours following vaccination and may last 1 to 2 days. Allergic reactions are uncommon after vaccination but can be severe in some people.

These reactions are due to an allergy to egg protein or to other components of the vaccine, including the antibiotics neomycin and polymyxin, which are in the vaccine in small amounts. Some severe allergic reactions can happen within 15 minutes. That is why it is important to wait in the allocated area for 15 minutes after being vaccinated.

## 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. Vaccinating against flu during pregnancy can not only protect pregnant women but provide ongoing protection to a newborn baby for the first six months after birth. If in doubt, please speak to your doctor to confirm it's safe to continue.

## What are the benefits of flu vaccinations?

There are lots of reasons to get a flu vaccine each year. 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 (especially infants younger than 6 months old who are too young to get vaccinated).

Flu vaccinations also may make your illness milder if you do get sick.

Flu vaccinations can reduce the risk of more serious flu outcomes, like hospitalizations and deaths.

## 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 are frequently changing, and vaccines may be updated from one season to the next to protect against the most recent and common circulating strains.
- A person's immune protection from influenza vaccination declines over time and annual vaccination is recommended.

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## Should I receive the vaccine if I am feeling unwell?

If you are suffering from an acute feverish illness (temperature equal to or above 38.5 °C) you should not receive the vaccine until you have fully recovered.

If you are suffering from a mild illness and do not have a fever, there is no reason why you should not receive the vaccine. If you are feeling unwell at the time of your vaccination appointment, please discuss your symptoms with the nurse.

## 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 TG website, via the 'report a problem link'.

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

## Which type of flu shot does AVS offer?

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.

## 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](#).

As in previous years, national or regional authorities approve the composition and formulation of vaccines used in each country. It is a matter for the national or regional health and regulatory agencies to consider the relative benefit(s) and recommend the use of a trivalent or a quadrivalent influenza vaccine.

## Can I get a flu vaccination if I've had my COVID vaccination?

ATAGI recommends that it is acceptable to co-administer a COVID-19 booster vaccine dose with other vaccines. More information is available at: ATAGI Clinical Guidance on Use of COVID-19 Vaccine in Australia.

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

The COVID-19 vaccine will not protect you against influenza (flu). It will be important to get a flu vaccination for the upcoming flu season. Flu vaccination reduces your chances of getting influenza, which means it reduces the risk of you having influenza.

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### What infection control / hygiene can I expect during my vaccination?

Standard principles of infection prevention and control during you can expect during your appointment include:

1. The nurse/pharmacist will sanitise their hands before and after your vaccination
2. A clean cotton ball/hypoallergenic tape or a band-aid will be applied to your injection site after your vaccination
3. All sharps and clinical waste will be safely handled and disposed of immediately after your vaccination and
4. Routine cleaning of the work area will be conducted throughout the service.

Please note: It is likely the nurse/pharmacist will not be wearing gloves or swipe your arm with an alcohol swab.

Rest assured, this is current evidence based best practice for vaccine administration