



Influenza: Frequently Asked Questions

What is immunisation?

- Immunisation is the process of both receiving a vaccine and becoming immune to the disease as a result.
- After immunisation, you are far less likely to catch the disease you have been immunised against. If you do catch the disease, your illness will be less severe. Your recovery will be quicker than an unimmunised person's recovery.

From betterhealth.vic.gov.au:

- The vaccination uses your body's immune system to increase protection from an infectious disease, before you come into contact with the pathogen. In other words, you mount an immune response without having been infected, or suffering the actual symptoms.
- If you come into contact with an infectious disease after you've been vaccinated, your body works to stop you from becoming infected, or you may get just a mild case. Unlike other proposed approaches to immunisation (such as homeopathy), vaccinations have been rigorously tested to demonstrate their safety and effectiveness in protecting against infectious disease.

What is influenza (the flu)?

- An acute viral respiratory infection, which causes fatigue, high fevers, respiratory symptoms and sometimes severe infection, pneumonia and death.
- Influenza subtypes A & B cause the most severe illness.
- Incubation period is usually 2 days, ranging from 1-4 days.
- Infectious from 24 hours prior to symptoms, and approximately 7 days after.

Can I get the flu from the vaccination?

No, Influenza vaccines in Australia do not contain live viruses, and therefore cannot give you Influenza.

Who should be vaccinated?

Recommended for all people aged >6 months, particularly the following high risk individuals:

- Children, people aged 65 years or over, Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander, those with pre-existing medical conditions or immunocompromise.
- Household contacts of those with influenza are highly likely to contract the virus.

When is the best time to be vaccinated?

- As soon as the vaccine becomes available, as it may take up to 2 weeks to become fully effective.
- Vaccines are available prior to the traditional influenza season each year, which is typically in the winter months.

How often should I be vaccinated against the flu?

- Yearly vaccination is recommended, as the vaccine composition changes according to the predicted circulating strains, and immunity begins to reduce over several months.

How effective is the flu vaccine?

- The Influenza vaccine is very effective at reducing severe infection or hospitalisation.

40-60%

Overall effectiveness depending on the age group and demographic of the individuals, the specific parameters assessed, and the circulating strains match with the vaccine composition.

70-90%

Strain specific effectiveness in healthy adults for 1-3 years, although immunity begins to reduce after several months.

40-60%

Efficacy – in elderly, preventing hospitalisation and pneumonia.

What strains does the 2022 vaccine protect me against?

Current recommendations for vaccine composition for 2022 are:

- an A/Victoria/2570/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus
- an A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus
- a B/Austria/1359417/2021-like (B/Victoria lineage) virus
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (B/Yamagata lineage) virus

Who shouldn't be given the vaccine and why?

- Any person who has had anaphylaxis to a previous dose of influenza vaccine.
- Any person who has had a previous anaphylaxis to any component in the vaccine.

I'm scared of needles and the injection, what do I do?

- Our immunisation nurses are extremely experienced at giving injections, and needle phobia is very common. Please advise the nurse that you have a fear of needles, and the nurse will take appropriate steps to help ease your fear.
- Most people barely feel the injection, rather experiencing injection site pain post vaccination.

Why doesn't the nurse wipe my arm with alcohol wipes anymore?

- Alcohol swabs are not recommended for vaccinations, and may actually increase your chances of an injection site reaction or pain with vaccination.
- Water wipes may be used if the area is visibly dirty.

What should I do after I have been vaccinated?

- Please remain seated in the vicinity of the immunisation nurse for a period of 15 minutes, in the unlikely event that you experience an allergic reaction to the vaccine.

What side effects are there from being vaccinated with the flu vaccine?

- Injection site reactions occur in more than 10% of people who receive standard influenza vaccine intramuscularly.
- Potential side effects
 - Injection site pain, swelling and redness
 - Headache
 - Muscle ache
 - Tiredness
 - Mild fever
 - Nausea

I have already been sick with the flu this year should I still be vaccinated?

- **Yes**, there are many different strains of circulating influenza, and vaccination is therefore still recommended to protect you from other strains.

