

Consumer Frequently Asked Questions

2020 Funded Annual Influenza Program

March 2020

What is 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 influenza 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. Influenza 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 influenza. For some people the vaccine is funded (free).

What is the Funded Influenza Program?

Influenza vaccine is provided free under the nationally funded influenza program and South Australian state funded program for the 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 homeless, the elderly and young children.

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

Why do some people get 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 influenza 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 2019 influenza vaccine early in their pregnancy, can have the 2020 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 flu 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
 - 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 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 influenza vaccine, they should have two doses at least four weeks apart

Adults aged 65 years or older

- are more likely to be affected by flu complications such as pneumonia and to be hospitalised
- receive an influenza vaccine made specifically to boost the immune response for better protection in this older age group

People who are homeless

- people who are homeless are at higher risk of complications of flu and spreading the flu
- people who are homeless 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 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 flu 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 able to have a free influenza vaccine.

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 vaccine available for purchase.

Talk to your immunisation provider to find out how much it will cost and to arrange to have the vaccine.

Some employers and organisations pay to provide 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 is expected to be available from April, but this can vary.

Several brands of 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 vaccine is 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 to funded influenza vaccines.

Check with your immunisation provider to find out approximately 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 flu season which is usually June to September in most parts of Australia.

However, flu infections occur throughout the year so the influenza vaccine can be given at any time during the year while 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 influenza vaccine better than another?

No. All influenza vaccines used in Australia 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 having 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 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, short lasting reactions for some people. Generally, common reactions such as fever, headache, muscle aches, soreness and swelling at the injection site begin within a few hours, last 1-2 days and go away without any treatment. Severe allergic reactions are very rare.

You cannot get the flu 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.

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
11 Hindmarsh Square
Adelaide SA 5000
Telephone: 1300232 272
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisationprovider
Public-I1-A1**

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