

Influenza, commonly referred to as the flu, is a contagious respiratory infection caused by flu viruses that affect the nose, throat, and, in some cases, the lungs. It spreads easily and rapidly among people through coughing, talking, sneezing, and contact with contaminated surfaces, hands, tissues, and other infected items. While the flu can cause severe illness and complications in anyone, certain groups, particularly older people, are at a higher risk of experiencing serious flu infection, complications, and hospitalisation.

The Influenza Vaccine

The 'flu' vaccine is administered via an injection generally into the upper arm. It is a dead vaccine, offering protection against four distinct strains of the flu without the possibility of causing the flu itself. The strains included in this year's vaccine composition are:

- A/Missouri/11/2025 (H1N1) pdm09-like virus (new strain for 2026)
- A/Singapore/GP20238/2024 (H3N2)-like virus (new strain for 2026)
- B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus

Flu viruses continually evolve, and each year's vaccine is designed to protect against the three flu viruses most likely to be prevalent during that year. While it may not prevent all instances of flu, it is the most effective defence against the disease. It is recommended to receive the flu vaccination annually, and it takes approximately two weeks for the vaccine's protection to develop, lasting several months to a year. It is important to note that conditions not caused by the influenza virus are sometimes mistaken for the flu, and the vaccine solely prevents influenza.

Special Information for People Aged Over 65

People aged 65 and older are more susceptible to severe flu-related illness, and standard vaccines may be less effective in this age group. Consequently, a stronger vaccine is recommended for older people, which is primarily available through general practitioners (GPs). We advise those over 65 to obtain this vaccine from their GP, but if this is not feasible, the vaccine provided by VaxWorks offers greater protection compared to not getting vaccinated at all.

Who Should NOT Receive the Vaccine?

People allergic to influenza vaccines or any of the vaccine components should not be vaccinated. Those with a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome should consult with your GP before receiving vaccination.

People with Egg Allergies

People with egg allergies, including a history of anaphylaxis, can safely receive influenza vaccines.

Flu Vaccine and COVID-19 Vaccine

There is no need to delay getting either the flu or COVID-19 vaccine. Receiving both vaccines on the same day or within a few days is safe and effective, although it may lead to an increase in some common side effects.

Possible Side Effects of the Flu Vaccine

Like any medication, the flu vaccine can result in minor, short-lived side effects. Common side effects may include:

- Pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site
- Drowsiness, tiredness, or irritability
- Muscle aches
- A low-grade fever of 37 to 38 degrees celsius

Some side effects may resemble 'flu-like' symptoms, but it's important to note that all flu vaccines currently available in Australia do not contain live viruses and cannot cause the flu. Serious reactions, including a severe allergic reaction are extremely rare.

Minimising the Side Effects of the Flu Vaccine

Many of the common side effects can often be alleviated by:

- Staying well-hydrated
- Resting
- Taking paracetamol as directed on the packaging.

If a reaction following vaccination is unexpected, persistent or severe, or if you are worried, see your GP.

(2026 Flu Info Sheet v1)