

1. What is immunisation?

Immunisation uses the body's natural defence mechanism – the immune system – to build resistance to an infection. The vaccine contains inactive particles of the virus that are used to stimulate your body's own immune response without causing you to actually contract the virus itself.

2. What is influenza - "The Flu?"

The flu is a highly infectious viral illness which is caused by the influenza virus. It tends to be much more severe than a common cold. Symptoms include rapid onset of fever, muscle aches, joint pain, headache, sore throat, dry cough and a generalised feeling of being unwell. Flu illness commonly lasts up to 10 days or longer if complications occur. The flu can be followed by a secondary illness, such as pneumonia. The peak time for flu spread is through winter into early spring each year. The majority of cases can be prevented by immunisation.

Most people think that when they have a runny nose or a sore throat, they have the "flu" but this is not usually the case. They usually have a common cold, which is a mild, short-term illness which, although inconvenient, rarely causes significant debility. The "cold" is caused by a range of viruses, which are different to the influenza virus. An influenza sufferer is often so unwell that they are confined to bed. The flu can be complicated by a range of secondary problems, including pneumonia and even death in high-risk individuals (e.g. the elderly). A flu outbreak occurs most years, but every 10 years or so, a major epidemic occurs in which larger numbers of the population are infected.

3. How effective is the influenza vaccine?

The flu vaccine is the most effective way to prevent influenza and the potentially serious complications that arise from contracting the illness. However, the effectiveness of the flu vaccine does vary from year to year depending on the types of viruses that circulate in the community. As of 2019, the overall vaccine effectiveness is estimated to be between 40-60% in Australia¹.

4. What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza is a highly contagious respiratory viral illness. Influenza A and B are the major types of influenza viruses that cause human disease and affect people of all ages. Persons with influenza may have fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, runny nose and watery eyes. Children may experience vomiting and diarrhoea in addition to these symptoms. Although the fever and body aches usually last for 3-5 days, a cough and fatigue may persist for two weeks or more.

5. Why does TELUS Health collect my Medicare number?

TELUS Health is obligated to report all vaccinations administered to the Australian Immunisation Register. Medicare numbers are used to ensure that records are matched to the correct individual during this process. If you do not have a Medicare card, TELUS Health will still be able to vaccinate you, in which case alternative details will be used to record the vaccination on the Australian Immunisation Register.

6. I have received a COVID vaccination. Can I get my flu vaccination?

There is no longer a requirement to wait between receiving a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and an influenza vaccine. You can receive both within proximity, provided you are suitably eligible for both vaccines.

7. Who gets influenza?

Anyone can get influenza, especially when it is widespread in the community. People who have pre-existing chronic diseases, especially of the heart or lungs, as well as the elderly or very young, are particularly susceptible to the complications associated with influenza infection, which can, in some cases, be fatal.

8. I'm over 65 years of age. What vaccine should I get?

It is currently recommended that individuals aged over 65 years old should receive a special enhanced influenza vaccine specifically designed for those in this age group. TELUS Health does not have access to this vaccine at this time and only supplies the standard adult-age (18-65yr) influenza vaccine. This specially formulated vaccine for those 65+ years old can typically only be obtained through GP clinics, pharmacies and community health centres, so you may wish to discuss this further with your doctor.

9. Do I need to be re-vaccinated if I had the vaccine last year?

The influenza vaccination provides protection for one flu season. People who had the seasonal influenza vaccine anytime in 2023 still need to be vaccinated in 2024 to ensure a higher level of immunity.

10. What strains does the 2024 vaccine protect me against?

The 2024 egg-based quadrivalent vaccine protects against the four flu strains expected to most likely circulate in the Southern Hemisphere in 2024:

- an A/Sydney/5/2021 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus;
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

11. How long does it take for me to be protected, and how long does my protection last?

You will form antibodies to fight the flu around 3 – 14 days after receiving your immunisation. Your antibodies will peak at around 4 – 6 weeks – this is when you are most protected. Your antibodies will gradually fall, but you will generally remain protected for one flu season.

12. Why is it no longer routine for the vaccinator to wipe my arm with alcohol first?

If your skin is visibly clean, it is no longer considered medically necessary to wipe the arm with an alcohol swab. Evidence for any benefit of alcohol swabbing prior to vaccination is minimal and continues to be studied. For hygiene purposes, your vaccinator will have cleaned their hands with hand sanitiser, and in some cases, they may wear gloves as well.

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

Yes. Anyone travelling overseas should get vaccinated. You should try to be vaccinated no later than two days before you are due to travel in case you have any side effects that require advice/treatment.

14. If I am under 18 can I still have the vaccination?

TELUS Health only conduct flu vaccinations for adults i.e., those over the age of 18 on the date of vaccination. Those under 18 years of age may still be able to get vaccinated through their local GP or pharmacy service as an alternative option, depending on their location and age.

15. I have a cold or have already had the flu this year. Can I still have a flu vaccination?

Usually, we only delay the vaccination if your temperature is over 38.5 degrees Celsius. With a raised temperature, it is preferable to postpone vaccination till you recover from your illness. If you have a mild cold or have had it for more than two days, you probably do not have a high temperature and can have the vaccination. Even if you have already had the flu this year, you will still benefit from the vaccine as it will protect you against three other flu strains.

Frequently Asked Questions

16. Who should not be given the vaccine?

Being a highly purified, inactivated vaccine, there are few contraindications to influenza vaccination:

- Anyone with a known allergy to the antibiotics: gentamicin, neomycin or polymyxin.
- Anyone with a known allergy to other components of the vaccine: polysorbate 80, octoxinol 9 and formaldehyde.
- Anyone with a present high fever (≥ 38.5 degrees Celsius).
- Anyone with a severe allergy to eggs or chicken feathers (people who develop swelling of the tongue, lips or develop respiration distress or collapse i.e. anaphylaxis, when exposed to these materials), will not be able to be vaccinated through TELUS Health and instead need to see their GP. This is for safety purposes and a longer medical observation period required.

17. I am on antibiotics. Can I still have a flu vaccination?

Yes, the vaccine does not interact with any antibiotics, so it is safe to have the vaccine while you are taking antibiotics.

18. I am allergic to penicillin. Can I still have a flu vaccination?

Yes, the vaccine does not contain any penicillin, so it is safe to have the vaccine even if you are allergic to penicillin.

19. What are the possible side effects?

Common possible side effects include redness, soreness, itching, bruising or mild swelling at the injection site. This usually clears within 1-2 days. Sometimes a tender lump under the arm appears (a lymph gland) that may be present for several days. Occasionally people develop a mild fever within 1-2 days of the vaccination and occasionally muscle aches, headache or a general feeling of being unwell. This usually lasts no more than 1-2 days. An allergic reaction may occur in those allergic to vaccine components.

20. Are there any more serious side effects?

There have been rare reports of the serious neurological disorder Guillain Barre Syndrome occurring in people vaccinated with the flu vaccine³. In people who have previously suffered Guillain Barre Syndrome, there may be an increased incidence of recurrence of this condition with the flu vaccine. Influenza immunisation is generally not recommended for people with a history of GBS occurring within 6 weeks of receiving a previous influenza vaccine. Anyone who has had Guillain Barre Syndrome in the past will not be able to be vaccinated through TELUS Health and should seek individual guidance from their usual GP clinic regarding flu vaccination or other options for other protective strategies during the flu season.

Anaphylaxis is a rare complication that can occur, characterised by the following possible symptoms; feeling faint, rash, swollen throat, asthma, collapse, and tingling of the tongue or lips. This is a medical emergency and needs treatment urgently. Our nurses all carry adrenaline if required for immediate treatment.

21. Does the vaccine reduce my natural immunity?

No. Vaccination does not reduce your natural immunity to infections – it acts as a “booster” to the immune system.

22. What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

The vaccine is especially recommended in most circumstances for pregnant and breastfeeding women. However, TELUS Health recommends you discuss the potential benefits and risks of the vaccine with your doctor prior to the vaccination clinic, as well as with your immunisation nurse on the day.

23. Can you get influenza from a vaccination?

No, it is not possible to get influenza from a vaccine.⁴ The viruses in the vaccine are inactivated and incapable of causing influenza. Instead, the person is protected from influenza by antibodies that are formed by the immune system's response to the vaccine. Generally, it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection. In the meantime, you are still at risk of catching the flu or may have already had it at the time of vaccination.

24. What else can I do to avoid getting or spreading the flu or a cold?

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and dispose of the tissue in a rubbish bin after you use it
- Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, especially after you cough or sneeze
- Regularly clean surfaces such as desks, taps and fridge doors, as flu viruses can live on these kinds of surfaces for a number of hours
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth, as germs are commonly spread this way
- Boost your immune system with a balanced diet, exercise, adequate sleep and try to reduce stress

25. When should vaccination be carried out?

Vaccination is best carried out from March to May each year, before the onset of the peak season for flu (July to September). You can, however, receive a vaccination at any given time during the flu season as well.

26. How can I report an adverse reaction to TELUS Health?

In the unlikely event of an adverse reaction, you should ensure that a medical assessment is arranged immediately, and the reaction is reported to TELUS Health when it is safe to do so. To report an adverse reaction to TELUS Health, please call the flu vaccination team on 1300 657 644 or email aus_bookings@telushealth.com

The information in this document has been sourced from the Australian Immunisation Handbook, Flu Vaccination Consumer Medicine Information (available at www.medicines.org.au), as well as publicly available government resources. Contact TELUS Health on 1300 657 644 for further assistance.

1. Australian Government Department of Health – Australian Influenza Surveillance Report 2019, <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ozflu-surveil-no11-19.htm>.
2. Therapeutic Goods Administration, 2022, <https://www.tga.gov.au/resources/publication/meeting-statements/aivc-recommendations-composition-influenza-vaccines-australia-2023>.
3. Australian Government Department of Health – Immunisation Handbook 2022, <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/contents/vaccine-preventable-diseases/influenza-flu#contraindications-and-precautions>.
4. Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/flushot.htm>.