

## Common questions about Flu Vaccination...

### Q. How long does it take for the flu vaccine to work in my body?

The flu vaccine takes up to 2 weeks to provide protection following vaccination. Some studies have observed protective levels of antibodies developing as early as 4 - 6 days following vaccination. It is recommended that the flu vaccine be given in April – July, before the flu transmission season begins and prior to peak influenza activity during the winter months. If you are exposed to a flu virus shortly before - or within - 2 weeks of being vaccinated, you may still catch the flu.

### Q. Does flu vaccination work?

YES, the flu vaccine does work. Influenza vaccination reduces hospitalisation and deaths by 20% to 50%.

### Q. What strains does the 2021 flu vaccine protect me from?

The antigen composition and strains for the approaching influenza season are determined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Commission of the European Community. This year's flu vaccine contains the following strains:

- ~ an A/Victoria/2570/2019 (H1N1) pdm09 - like virus; (i.e. covering the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 "swine flu" virus);
- ~ an A/Hong Kong/2671/2019 (H3N2) - like virus;
- ~ a B/Washington/02/2019 - like virus (B/Victoria/2/87 lineage)
- ~ a B/Phuket/3073/2013 - like virus (B/Yamagata/16/88 lineage)

### Q. Can I receive a flu vaccination if within the past 2 weeks I have received, or within the next 2 weeks I am scheduled to receive, a COVID vaccination?

The current recommended spacing between receiving a COVID vaccination and receiving a flu vaccination is at least 2 weeks. Therefore, if in the past 2 weeks you have received, or, if within the next 2 weeks you are scheduled to receive, a COVID vaccination, please discuss this with the Vaccinator prior to receiving your flu vaccination.

Please note that whilst a 2 week gap between receiving flu and COVID vaccines is recommended, there are no clinical safety concerns should the gap between vaccines be less than 2 weeks.

### Q. Can anyone have a flu vaccination?

If you have a temperature before vaccination, or have had a previous reaction to any vaccination, please discuss this with the Vaccinator prior to receiving your vaccination.

### Q. Will having the seasonal flu vaccine protect me from getting "swine flu"?

YES, the 2021 vaccine contains an A/Victoria/2570/2019 (H1N1) - like virus strain that covers pandemic (H1N1) 2009 "swine flu".

### Q. How long does flu protection last, and, why should I have a flu vaccination every year?

Immunity to the strains in a flu vaccine generally wanes within 6 to 12 months following vaccination, so it is important that annual flu vaccinations be administered. The changing nature of the influenza virus means that new flu strains are constantly appearing. Influenza viruses are capable of evading the body's immune system by undergoing continuous genetic variation and may change from flu season to flu season. In most years, a new flu vaccine is developed to provide protection against the predominant flu strains predicted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be circulating in that particular year.

### Q. Can you get influenza ("the flu") from having the vaccine?

NO. Flu vaccines do not contain the whole virus - only the part of the virus that triggers your body to produce antibodies.

### Q. Will receiving a flu vaccination protect me against the common cold?

NO. By vaccinating against the flu, you are providing protection against a serious viral illness - that is, influenza. A flu vaccination may provide some cross protection against an influenza virus not present in the flu vaccine. However, flu vaccination does not protect you against the common cold.

### Q. Will an anti-viral prevent me developing influenza?

NO. Antivirals will only help relieve symptoms but not prevent infection from the influenza virus.

### Q. Are there any side effects?

Pain, swelling, redness, and/or, tenderness around the injection site are the most frequent side effects, but, in general are mild and of short duration. The majority of expected side effects disappear within 1 to 2 days.

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**say "BOO" to "Flu"**

## Common questions about Flu Vaccination (cont)...

### Q. How effective is a flu vaccination against flu strains not included in the vaccine?

Effectiveness is reduced by the degree of difference between circulating virus strains and vaccine strains. There may be some cross protection against an influenza virus not in the vaccine. The influenza virus keeps changing and new vaccines are formulated for each Northern and Southern hemisphere flu season. WHO devotes significant resources to maintaining global surveillance on dominant flu strains each year in the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

### Q. I am (or could be) pregnant. Can I have the flu vaccine?

YES. The seasonal flu vaccine is strongly recommended for women who will be pregnant during the flu season - refer to pages 269 to 276 of the Immunisation Handbook 2020 (19th Feb 2021 update) entitled "Pregnant women, the fetus and neonates".

Because there is no registered or effective vaccine for children aged under 6 months, vaccination during pregnancy is highly recommended to improve maternal foetal passive antibody transfer. Influenza vaccination of pregnant women has been shown to significantly decrease influenza in their newborn babies. Breastfeeding is also recommended, to deliver passive immunity to the infant. In a 2016 Australian study, influenza immunisation during pregnancy showed that stillbirth was 51% less likely among vaccinated mothers compared to unvaccinated mothers. There is no evidence that influenza vaccine prepared from inactivated virus causes damage to the foetus.

### Q. I don't need a flu vaccination - I am too healthy?

Being fit and healthy will not protect you from getting the flu. Healthy individuals are still at risk of influenza and may have flu symptoms for up to 10 days. On average, people with the flu will miss 3 to 5 work days.

### Q. Who supplies the flu vaccine?

PHARMAC has the contract in New Zealand to source supply for "funded" flu vaccines from global flu vaccine manufacturers.

Afluria® Quad is the seasonal influenza vaccine that will be available for those in NZ under 65 years of age in 2021.

Fluad® Quad is available free from GP's and Pharmacies in NZ for those aged 65 and over in 2021.

Afluria® Quad Junior is available for those aged 6 to 35 months in NZ in 2021.

**Afluria® Quad** is produced by Seqirus (formerly bioCSL) who are the only vaccine manufacturers in the Southern Hemisphere. Seqirus is the second largest influenza vaccine company in the world.

**Fluad® Quad** is produced by Seqirus (formerly bioCSL). FLUAD® Quad is made specifically for those aged 65 and over.

### In Summary...

There are obvious advantages to influenza vaccination:

- ~ **less** time off work – less loss of income
- ~ **less** burden on your family, relatives and work colleagues
- ~ **less** strain on medical resources

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## Common questions about novel coronavirus (COVID-19)

For the latest, and frequently updated, information about novel coronavirus (COVID-19), see The Ministry of Health's website:  
<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

For the most up to date answers to novel coronavirus (COVID-19) questions, see The Ministry of Health's website:  
<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-questions-and-answers>

### Q. What is novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Coronaviruses are a large and diverse family of viruses which include the common cold. The most recent diseases caused by coronaviruses include severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). In January 2020, officials identified a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2 (formerly known as 2019-nCoV). The disease caused by the new virus has been named COVID-19.

### Q. What are the signs and symptoms of novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to a range of other illnesses such as influenza and do not necessarily mean that someone has novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Symptoms of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) include:

- fever
- coughing
- difficulty breathing. Difficulty breathing is a sign of possible pneumonia and requires immediate medical attention.

If you have these symptoms and have recently travelled overseas or have been in close contact with someone confirmed with COVID-19, please contact Healthline (for free) on 0800 358 5453, or, your doctor immediately.

### Q. How does novel coronavirus (COVID-19) spread between people?

Scientific evidence confirms that novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is spread by droplets and contact with surfaces that infectious droplets have landed on. This means that when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or, talks, they may generate droplets containing the virus. The virus droplets are too large to stay in the air for long, so they quickly settle on surrounding surfaces. An individual who comes into contact with an object or surface with viral particles on the surface can then transfer the virus droplets to themselves - or others - by touching their mouth, nose, or, eyes.

Droplet-spread diseases can be spread by:

- coughing or sneezing
- close personal contact
- contact with an object or surface with viral particles on it and then touching your mouth, nose, or, eyes.

### Q. How do I protect myself and others from novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?

You should always practice good hygiene by:

- covering coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing
- washing hands with water and soap for at least 20 seconds, and, then drying them thoroughly:
  - before eating or handling food
  - after using the toilet
  - after coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose or wiping children's noses
  - after caring for sick people.

People with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice good cough etiquette (i.e. maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and, washing hands).

### Q. When will a vaccine against novel coronavirus (COVID-19) become available for the 'general population' in New Zealand?

The Ministry of Health's first priority is to vaccinate border workers and essential staff who are at greatest risk of getting COVID-19. The Ministry and DHB's started administering COVID-19 vaccines to this group of people in February 2021.

The Ministry's aim is to commence vaccination of the general public in the 2nd half of 2021.

COVID-19 vaccine administration for the 'general population' will depend on whether New Zealand has any community transmission at the time of COVID-19 vaccines being available.

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