

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 – June, 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 2023 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/Sydney/5/2021 (H1N1) pdm09 - like virus; (i.e. covering the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 "swine flu" virus);
- ~ an A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2) - like virus;
- ~ a B/Austria/1359417/2021 - like virus (B/Victoria/2/87 lineage)
- ~ a B/Phuket/3073/2013 - like virus (B/Yamagata/16/88 lineage)

Q. Does the 2023 flu vaccine contain protection against COVID-19?

NO. There are presently clinical trials underway worldwide to study the effectiveness of a combined vaccine for both seasonal flu and COVID-19. However, there are currently no combined seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccines available outside of these clinical trials. Consequently, flu vaccine in 2023 has been manufactured in the same way that flu vaccines have traditionally been manufactured. At present, vaccines against each of flu and COVID-19 need to be administered separately - ie 2 vaccinations.

Q. Can I receive a flu vaccination if I have received, or I am scheduled to receive, a COVID-19 vaccination?

All vaccines can now be given at the same time or immediately before or after receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccines that can be given at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine include; influenza, measles-mumps-rubella (MMR), human papillomavirus (HPV, Gardasil 9), tetanus and whooping cough vaccine (Tdap, Boostrix) and meningococcal vaccines.

The exception is for receiving a shingles vaccine - where a gap of 7 days is recommended between receiving a COVID-19 vaccine and the shingles vaccine in order to ensure a good immune response to each individual vaccine in older adults.

Pregnant women are recommended to receive influenza vaccine and COVID-19 vaccine at any stage of pregnancy. Whooping cough vaccine can be received from 16 weeks gestation. These vaccines can be given at the same time or separately.

Q. Can anyone have a flu vaccination?

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

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. 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.

Not everyone with the flu displays flu symptoms, or, feels unwell enough to visit their GP. However, these infected individuals can still pass the flu on to others through touch - or in the air - to those likely to get sicker than themselves such as; infants, pregnant women, the elderly, and, people with pre-existing medical conditions.

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

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

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.

PH: (0800) 357 357

say "BOO" to 'Flu'

Common questions about Flu Vaccination (cont)...

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. 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:
a) page 310 - 311 of the Immunisation Handbook 2020 (version 21, 15th Feb 2023 update) entitled "Pregnant women, the fetus and neonates", and,
b) pages 317 of the Immunisation Handbook 2020 (version 21, 15th Feb 2023 update) entitled "Pregnancy and breastfeeding".

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 fetus.

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

YES, the 2023 vaccine contains an A/Sydney/5/2021 (H1N1) - like virus strain that covers pandemic (H1N1) 2009 "swine flu".

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 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.

FluQuadri® is produced by Sanofi Pasteur (the vaccines division of Sanofi-Aventis Group). Sanofi Pasteur is one of the world's largest pharmaceutical company's and produces approximately 1.4 billion doses of vaccine yearly, of which 120 million doses are influenza vaccine.

Fluad® Quad is produced by Seqirus (formerly bioCSL). FLUAD® Quad is made specifically for those aged 65 and over and is available free from GP's and Pharmacies in NZ for those aged 65 and over in 2023.

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>

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
- ~ **reduced** absenteeism at work
- ~ **YOU** don't feel miserable!

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