

# 2020 Influenza Vaccination Information & Frequently Asked Questions



We ask that you read the following information prior to consenting and receiving the 2020 Influenza Vaccine.

## ***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.

## ***What is Influenza?***

The 'Flu' is a highly contagious viral illness caused by the Influenza virus, it much more severe than the common cold. Symptoms include: rapid onset of fever, muscle aches, joint pains, headache, sore throat and cough. Influenza can last up to 14 days and sometimes can be followed by a secondary illness e.g. pneumonia. Peak infection period is traditionally during winter. Majority of cases can be prevented by annual influenza immunisation.

A patient with true influenza is often so unwell that they are confined to rest in bed. It can last up to 14 days and can be complicated by a range of problems, including pneumonia, and even death especially in high-risk individuals e.g. the elderly, those with chronic illnesses or impaired immune systems. A flu outbreak occurs most years, but every 10 years or so, a major Influenza Pandemic occurs, during which larger numbers of the population are infected.

## ***Can I get the Flu from the Flu vaccination?***

No. The vaccine contains only inactivated viral particles (a virus that has been concentrated, killed, then broken apart) and is therefore incapable of causing Influenza infection. People who develop a runny nose or sore throat after vaccination have usually coincidentally developed another viral illness.

## ***How effective is the Influenza vaccine?***

Influenza vaccination prevents up to 70% of cases of Influenza infection in healthy adults. Even if the virus 'gets through' the vaccine, the illness is usually milder and of shorter duration in those who are vaccinated.

## ***How often is Flu vaccination required?***

Once per year

## ***How long does it take for me to be protected and how long does my protection last?***

You will form natural 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 optimally protected. Your antibodies will gradually reduce, but you will remain protected for around 1 year.

## ***Why do I need to be vaccinated every year?***

The prevalent Influenza virus strains change each year through a process called antigenic drift. Therefore, the vaccine constituents are changed accordingly. The World Health Organization predicts the 4 strains that will be most prevalent, and the vaccine manufacturers then formulate their vaccines to cover these 4 strains.

## ***What strains does the 2020 vaccine protect me against?***

The 2020 Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (QIV) protects against the 4 mostly likely flu strains to circulate in the Southern Hemisphere in 2020:

- A/Brisbane (H1N1) like virus;
- A/South Australia/ (H3N2)-like virus;
- B/Phuket like virus;
- B/Washington like virus (excluded in the over 65 high dose trivalent (3 strain) vaccine)

## ***Will the vaccine protect me against Coronavirus (COVID-19)?***

The seasonal influenza vaccine will not protect you against COVID-19.

## ***Who should not be given the vaccine?***

Being a highly purified, inactivated vaccine, there are very few contraindications to Influenza vaccination.

Contraindications include:

- × 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 severe allergy to eggs or chicken feathers (people who develop swelling the tongue, lips or develop respiratory distress or collapse when exposed to the above)
- × Anyone with a high fever at the time of immunisation
- × Anyone who has a medical history of Gullain-Barre Syndrome (severe nerve disorder)

***If I am travelling overseas should I get this vaccination before I go?***

Yes. Everyone travelling overseas should be vaccinated with the Influenza Immunisation. Ideally you should try to be vaccinated 4-6 weeks prior to travel but no later than 2 days before you are due to travel, in case you have any side-effects that require advice or treatment.

***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 high e.g. over 38.5 degrees Celsius. With a temperature this high, you would usually be too unwell to be at work. If you have a mild Cold, and do not have a high temperature you 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 other Influenza strains. Medications

***I am having other vaccinations. Can I still have a Flu vaccination?***

Yes, because this vaccination can be given with other vaccines on the same day.

**Potential Side Effects*****What are the possible side-effects of Flu Vaccine?***

Possible redness, soreness, itching, bruising or mild swelling at the injection site. This usually resolves within 1-2 days. Sometimes a tender lump under the arm appears (a lymph node) that may be present for several days. Occasionally a hard lump may develop at the injection site. This may persist for a week or more. It does not require treatment. Occasionally people develop a mild fever within 1 –2 days of the vaccination and occasionally muscle aches, headache, tiredness or a general feeling of being unwell. These symptoms are likely not attributable to the flu vaccine, and more likely attributable to an existing viral infection.

***What can I do to treat the side-effects?***

Fever and pain can be treated with Paracetamol, taken as directed on the packet.

***Are there any more serious side-effects?***

There have been inconclusive reports of serious neurological disorders in people who have previously suffered from the severe nervous system disorder 'Guillain Barre Syndrome'. Those who have had Guillain Barre Syndrome should speak to their GP.

***Does the vaccine reduce my natural immunity?***

No. Vaccination does not reduce your natural immunity to infections - in fact, it boosts the impact of your own natural immunity.

**Allergies*****I am allergic to penicillin or sulpha antibiotics. Can I still have a Flu vaccination?***

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

***I am allergic to eggs. Can I still have a flu vaccination?***

If you have egg allergy and have previously had a flu vaccination without an allergic reaction, you may receive the vaccination. However, if you have not previously had a vaccination with an egg-based vaccine (influenza, measles mumps-rubella, or yellow fever vaccine), we recommend you discuss this with your GP.

**Other Frequently Asked Questions*****When should vaccination be carried out?***

Vaccination is best carried out during March-May each year, before the onset of the peak season for flu (July – September).

***What if I am pregnant or am breastfeeding?***

Influenza vaccine may be administered during all stages of pregnancy, including during the first trimester. The medical profession and governments worldwide have identified pregnant women as a high priority group for receiving an influenza vaccination

***How long after the vaccination should I avoid drinking alcohol?***

It is considered sensible to avoid alcohol for several hours after having the flu vaccination, but this is not an absolute rule. If you feel that you must drink alcohol, you should drink in moderation.

***How long do I have to wait before I can donate blood?***

You can donate blood immediately after you have a flu vaccination. You can also have the flu vaccination immediately after you donate blood.

***When can I drive after having the vaccination?***

It is fine to drive a motor vehicle (or handle heavy machinery) after the flu vaccination if: (a) It has been more than 15 minutes since you had the flu vaccination (b) You feel well and able to do so

***When can I exercise after having the vaccine?***

It is fine to exercise after having the vaccine if: (a) It has been more than 15 minutes since you had the flu vaccination (b) You feel well and able to do so (c) You are not at risk of developing a haematoma (e.g. on anticoagulants/blood thinning medication)

***What do I do if I need to contact the vaccinators following my vaccination?***

Our practice nurses can be contacted during office hours on 3286 1122.