

# What is influenza?

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Influenza (known as the flu) is a highly contagious acute respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses A, B and rarely C.

## How is influenza spread?

The virus is spread from person to person through microscopic droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is easier to catch in crowded areas and in confined spaces.

## What are the symptoms?

A person generally has a sudden onset of:

- fever
- headache
- muscle and joint pain
- feeling tired
- sore throat
- cough
- runny or stuffy nose
- often extreme fatigue

Symptoms usually appear within one to three days of being infected, and a person is considered contagious for another three to four days after symptoms appear.

Most people recover within two to seven days. Compared with other viral respiratory infections like common colds, influenza causes more severe complications such as pneumonia, particularly in children, elderly people and other vulnerable groups.

## How can influenza be treated?

New medications for influenza can be effective in reducing the severity and the duration of the illness.

***Influenza (known as the flu) is a highly contagious acute respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses A, B and rarely C. Vaccination is the most effective protection against influenza infection. Your doctor can vaccinate you with the current vaccine for the season.***

These must be taken early to be effective and are available only on prescription from your doctor. Otherwise, fever, headaches and muscle pains can be treated with fluids, paracetamol and rest.

## How can I prevent influenza?

Vaccination remains the most effective protection against influenza infection. Anyone who wishes to avoid the flu should think about getting vaccinated well before winter begins each year.

Influenza vaccination is recommended for:

- all adults aged 65 years and over
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults aged 50 years and over
- adults and children older than 6 months with chronic diseases affecting the heart, lungs, or that require regular medical follow up
- residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- persons with immunodeficiency, including HIV/AIDS
- adults and children older than 6 months who live in a household with a person who fits into any of the categories above
- health care workers and staff of nursing homes and long term facilities who care for people at high risk
- children and teenagers (6 months to 18 years) on long-term aspirin therapy

- travellers, especially those in the above risk groups, if travelling to the northern hemisphere between October to March, should consider influenza vaccination prior to departure
- pregnant women who will be in the second or third trimester during the influenza season.

### When should I be vaccinated?

The best time to be vaccinated against influenza is in autumn, prior to the winter influenza outbreaks. The vaccine is usually available from March onwards each year.

### Where can I receive my vaccination?

Your doctor can vaccinate you with the current vaccine for the season.

### Will I have to pay for the vaccine?

If you are 65 years or older, or are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander aged 50 years or older, the vaccine will be free. However, the doctor may charge a consultation fee.

### Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. The most frequent side effect of vaccination is soreness at the vaccination site, which may last up to two days.

'Flu-like' symptoms such as fever, fatigue, and muscle soreness can also occur. These symptoms only mimic the flu. Other serious side effects are rare.

### Is it possible to catch the flu after I have been vaccinated?

No. The vaccine contains killed virus that cannot cause influenza.

### How effective is the vaccine?

It will take about two weeks for your body to develop immunity against the influenza virus after your vaccination. During this time you should avoid contact with people who may have influenza.

The influenza virus changes from time to time and the vaccine is designed to match the current circulating virus. The vaccine will provide about 70-90% protection against infection for about one year.

However, even if you do catch the flu, the likelihood of developing complications from the infection will be reduced.

### Who should not have the vaccination?

- People with allergies to eggs.
- People with a high fever (greater than 38.5° C) should wait until their fever has gone.
- People who have previously had Guillain-Barré Syndrome should discuss this with their doctor prior to proceeding with vaccination.

### Do I need to receive a flu vaccine every year?

Yes. Annual vaccination is necessary to provide continuing protection against the most recent influenza virus.

#### Further information – Public Health Units in NSW

For more information please contact your doctor, local public health unit or community health centre – see under NSW Government at the front of the White Pages.

#### Metropolitan Areas

Central Sydney	9515 3180
South Eastern Sydney	9382 8333
Northern Sydney	9477 9400
South Western Sydney	9828 5944
Western Sydney	9840 3603
Wentworth	4734 2022

#### Rural Areas

Central Coast	4349 4845
Mid North Coast	6588 2750
Mid Western	6339 5548
Hunter	4924 6477
Illawarra	4255 2200
New England	6766 2288
Northern Rivers	6620 7500
Macquarie	6841 2216
Southern NSW	4827 3428
Greater Murray	6021 4799
Far West	(08) 8080 1499

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