

INFLUENZA VACCINE 2022 – INFORMATION SHEET

What is influenza (the flu)?

Influenza is a contagious disease caused by infection with influenza viruses. It mainly affects the throat and lungs but it can also cause problems with the heart and other parts of the body, especially in young children and adults with health problems and pregnant women.

Influenza Symptoms:

Symptoms usually occur one to three days after infection and can include fever, cough, sore throat, muscle and joint aches, headaches, runny or stuffy nose and severe fatigue. Children and the elderly can experience nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhoea. Compared with many other viruses such as the common cold, influenza tends to cause more severe symptoms and can be associated with life-threatening complications such as pneumonia, heart failure or stroke. It can also worsen other conditions people are living with.

How is influenza spread?

The influenza virus is easily spread by coughing, sneezing and by contact with contaminated hands and surfaces. Infected people are contagious from approximately one day before symptoms start until three to five days after.

How is influenza diagnosed?

Your health care provider may diagnose an influenza-like-illness by examination and symptoms.

The specific diagnosis of influenza can only be confirmed by testing a sample from the back of your nose and throat.

Who is at risk of influenza?

Anyone can get influenza. Those most likely to develop complications from influenza include children, pregnant women, the elderly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people with other health conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, diabetes and other metabolic disorders, renal disease, neurological conditions and those with lowered immunity. If people contract both COVID and influenza at the same time it may result in severe consequences.

How can influenza be prevented?

The best way to prevent influenza is to get the vaccine at least two weeks before the beginning of the flu season. The vaccine is recommended for any person six months of age and over. The strains used in the seasonal influenza vaccine can change from year to year depending on which viruses are circulating. This year influenza vaccines available in Australia, will include the usual egg-based vaccines, and a cell-or recombinant based vaccine. These vaccines will include the following four circulating viruses:

| Egg-based Vaccines: | Cell-or recombinant based Vaccines |
|--|---|
| A/Victoria/2570/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus; A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus; B/Austria/1359417/2021-like (B/Victoria lineage) virus; B/Phuket/3073/2013-like (B/Yamagata lineage) virus. | A/Wisconsin/588/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus; A/Darwin/6/2021 (H3N2)-like virus; B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus; B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus |

Yarra Council is only providing the **egg-based** vaccines. The influenza vaccine contains no live virus; only some proteins from the virus surface. It is safe and effective and because there is no live virus it cannot give you influenza. Side effects are usually local i.e. pain/redness at the injection site, resolving within a day or two. Sometimes people who receive the flu vaccine can still get influenza, however, if you are vaccinated and get flu', you will have a much milder disease course.

It takes approximately two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against the flu. The peak effectiveness of the vaccine occurs in the first 3 to 4 months after getting the vaccine.

Other ways to protect yourself include, washing your hands with soap and running water after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose and before touching other people or objects, covering your coughs and sneezes with the inside of your elbow or tissue and disposing of the tissue in the bin after use. If you need to seek medical care, call the medical centre for advice on making an appointment. Also, if you are unwell, stay home to avoid spreading the disease.

The influenza vaccine and COVID vaccine

The influenza vaccine only protects against the four circulating influenza viruses. This year a gap between getting a flu shot and COVID vaccine is not required. Your body will develop protection against both diseases and possible side effects are generally similar whether vaccines are given alone or with other vaccines.

For more information go to: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/flu and www2.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation