

i M M U N I S A T I O N



Commonwealth Department of
Health and
Ageing

i M M U N I S E
A U S T R A L I A P R O G R A M

A joint Commonwealth and State/Territory Initiative

Influenza Vaccine for People Aged 65 and Over

Questions and Answers

**Are you
65+??**

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly called ‘the flu’, is an illness caused by the influenza virus. The virus is passed from person to person by a simple sneeze or cough. Influenza can lead to illnesses which are more severe than those caused by other respiratory viruses, such as the common cold. Typical symptoms of influenza include fever, cough, sore throat, fatigue, muscle aches, headaches, runny noses and watery eyes.

What are some of the complications of influenza?

Most healthy adults will recover from influenza within a few days without any complications. However, some people, especially those aged 65 years and older and people with certain chronic medical conditions, can suffer complications. This can include pneumonia requiring hospitalisation, and even death.

Why should I receive an influenza vaccination?

People aged 65 years and older are more likely to suffer complications from influenza. The influenza vaccine is a very important way to help protect you from catching influenza. Even healthy persons aged 65 and older are at risk of contracting the virus.

When should I be vaccinated?

The best time to be vaccinated against influenza is in autumn, before the influenza outbreaks in winter.

Do I need to receive a flu vaccine every year?

Yes. The influenza virus changes all the time and the vaccine is changed to match the current circulating virus. The vaccine will provide about 70% protection against infection for about one year. Annual vaccination is necessary to provide continuing protection against the most recent influenza virus.

Is the vaccine free?

Yes. If you are 65 years or older, the vaccine will be free. You may, however, need to pay for the consultation with your doctor or health centre.

Where can I receive my vaccination?

Your doctor will be able to give you the vaccine or in some states and territories you may be able to visit your local health centre.

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. The vaccine cannot cause influenza.

Immediate allergic reactions (such as hives, asthma, breathlessness or collapsing) rarely occur after influenza vaccination. These reactions are probably the result of an allergy to egg protein, which may be present in the vaccine. Guillain-Barre Syndrome has rarely been associated with influenza vaccine and represents a substantially lower risk than complications as a result of severe influenza.

Can the influenza vaccine cause the flu?

No. Influenza vaccine contains killed virus that cannot cause influenza. ‘Flu-like’ symptoms may occur as a result of the vaccine but these symptoms are not influenza.

Who should not be vaccinated against influenza?

Persons who have an allergy to eggs should not be given influenza vaccine. This includes people who, on eating eggs, develop swelling of the lips or tongue or experience acute respiratory distress or collapse. Influenza vaccine should also not be given to persons who have a fever associated with another illness.

Your doctor or health care provider will be able to advise if you should not receive the vaccine.

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

It will take about two weeks for your body to develop immunity against the influenza virus after your yearly vaccination. During this time, you should avoid contact with people who may have influenza. However, even if you do catch the flu, the likelihood of developing complications from the infection will be reduced.

For more information about influenza or influenza vaccination, please see your doctor, or in some states and territories you may be able to visit your local health centre.

For information on the Influenza Vaccine Program for Older Australians contact the Immunisation Infoline on

1800 671 811

or visit the Immunise Australia website

<http://immunise.health.gov.au>
