

Influenza (the flu)

What is Influenza?

Influenza, commonly known as 'the flu', is an illness caused when an influenza virus infects the respiratory tract – your nose and lungs.

Influenza infection usually has different symptoms and causes a more severe illness than the common cold. It may be a life-threatening infection in certain people.

Flu is a common trigger for asthma along with other respiratory viruses.

Australian flu outbreaks are usually seasonal, occurring from late autumn through winter and into early spring. Influenza vaccination (the flu shot) offers a high degree of protection against the flu and its severe consequences. There are several different influenza viruses and strains. The type usually changes from year to year, so the recommended vaccine also changes from year to year. See your doctor for a flu shot each autumn. The vaccine is free for people with severe asthma and anyone over 65.

Dispelling the Myths

MYTH 1: Influenza is not serious.

Influenza (the flu) is a highly contagious and for some people it's a potentially life-threatening disease.

MYTH 2: It's just a cold.

While cold and flu symptoms might seem similar at first, the flu can become serious. Typical flu symptoms can include:

- fever (often high) or chills
- sore throat and/or severe cough
- headaches, muscle aches and pains

Children's symptoms may also include nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea

MYTH 3: Vaccination can cause the flu.

Influenza vaccines used in Australia do not contain any live viruses so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot.

MYTH 4: The vaccine is not effective.

While the vaccine may not be 100% effective in all people, it remains the single most effective way to prevent influenza.

MYTH 5: Vaccination will make me ill.

Serious reactions to the flu shot are rare. The most common side-effects are skin redness and swelling where you had the injection.

Allergic reactions are uncommon but may occur in people with a severe egg allergy. If you have an egg allergy, check with your doctor before getting a flu shot.



MYTH 6: I'm young & healthy so I won't get the flu.

Anyone can contract the flu. Being fit and healthy doesn't stop infection. The flu is highly contagious, so protecting yourself can also help protect those close to you

MYTH 7: I was vaccinated last year – I'll be right for a while

The types of viruses circulating in the community usually change from year to year. You need an annual flu shot to keep your immunity up to date.

MYTH 8: Sick people shouldn't be vaccinated against the flu.

If you have a minor illness without fever, vaccination is fine, especially if you are in one of the groups at risk of serious complications. These include people with heart conditions, asthma and other chronic respiratory conditions, chronic kidney disease, diabetes, neuromuscular disorders and impaired immunity.

MYTH 9: Flu vaccination is dangerous for pregnant women and unborn children.

There is growing evidence that vaccination during pregnancy protects the mother from serious illness and then the infant during the first months of life. There is no evidence that vaccination is unsafe for mother or baby.

MYTH 10: I had the vaccination last year but still got the flu.

Did you have the flu or a cold? The vaccine doesn't protect against colds.

- Most adults have 2 to 4 colds a year.
- Parents of young children have more.
- Children have around 6 to 10 colds per year.

For more details about immunisation

Visit Immunisation Coalition
immunisationcoalition.org.au

Need more information?

Visit National Asthma Council Australia's
website nationalasthma.org.au