

Getting the Flu Vaccine – Yes or No?

The flu vaccine will soon be available. Why should you consider getting it?

The flu isn't really serious – why vaccinate?

- The flu is not like a cold – it can be a significant illness resulting in hospitalisation and even death. Every year thousands of Australians are hospitalised with flu complications.
- A person who has the flu together with an existing medical condition such as asthma or diabetes may have severe, even life threatening, symptoms.
- The flu can also have complications such as ear infections, sinusitis, asthma, pneumonia, seizures, premature labour and death.

Who is most at risk of a bad flu?

- Children and elderly people are particularly at risk because their immune system is not strong.
- Pregnant women can experience changes to the immune system, heart and lungs which leave them vulnerable to the flu.
- People with chronic illnesses or medical conditions are more at risk as their immune system is weakened.

What does the vaccine cover?

- The vaccine doesn't provide complete protection against all flus. It particularly targets those strains of the flu that were most prevalent last year.
- It won't cover something new that might be circulating this year.

How effective is the vaccine?

- In healthy adults, the vaccine is 60-70% effective. That means you do get a flu, it will most likely be a mild dose.
- Older people or people who have a chronic illness don't have such a robust immune system so the vaccine may be less effective.

But won't the vaccine give me the flu?

- No – the flu vaccine doesn't contain any live virus.
- The vaccine fools your body into thinking it's caught the flu so it produces an immune reaction. For this reason, some people experience flu-like symptoms or even a fever after being vaccinated.

When is the best time to be vaccinated?

- Generally, the best time is towards the end of April or beginning of May. The effectiveness of the vaccine starts to decrease after 3-4 months so it's important not to have it too early.

What else can you do to avoid catching the flu?

- Wash your hands – especially before eating and drinking. If you don't have ready access to soap and water, use an alcohol antibacterial hand wash.
- Don't share items that touch the nose or mouth such as cutlery, cups, lipstick or cigarettes.
- Stay about one meter away from people who have flu like symptoms – further if they're sneezing or coughing.
- Regularly clean surfaces which are commonly touched by people such as door handles, taps, fridge door and benches.
- Encourage people to sneeze or cough into a tissue and immediately dispose of it.