

Getting the Flu Vaccine – Yes or No?

The flu vaccine for this year is now available. Why should you consider getting it?

What do we know about the 2019 flu season?

- Australia is expected a bad flu season this year. In March, 10,000 people were diagnosed with the flu. That's roughly three times the number diagnosed in March last year.

Why will it be so bad?

- The flu season last year was pretty quiet so people didn't build immunity to it. That means people are more susceptible to it this year.
- Also, the northern hemisphere had a longer flu season – it went to about March – so people travelling for holidays brought it back to Australia.

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 - last year nearly 6,000 people were hospitalised and 10% of those ended up in intensive care.
- The flu can also have complications such as ear infections, sinusitis, asthma, pneumonia, seizures, premature labour and death. People with medical conditions such as asthma or diabetes are particularly at risk of developing severe, even life threatening, symptoms.
- This year 4,000 people are expected to die of the flu.

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 later this year.

How effective is the vaccine?

- You don't build immunity until about 2 weeks after you get the vaccine and in healthy adults, the vaccine is 60-70% effective. That means if you do get a flu, it will most likely be a mild dose.

But won't the vaccine give me the flu?

- No – the flu vaccine doesn't contain any live virus.

Should you have the vaccine even if you're young and healthy?

- Yes – even young and healthy people get the flu and end up in hospital. Last year 10% of people under the age of 65 years who were hospitalised ended up in intensive care.

When is the best time to be vaccinated?

- As soon as possible – flu is already spreading rapidly. The peak flu season is usually around August and the effectiveness of the vaccine will start to decrease after 3-4 months so if you have it early, you may need a booster.