

FAQs on Flu Vaccinations by NUS University Health Centre

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is a respiratory illness that spreads easily through inhaled droplets in the air when in close contact with an infected person. Influenza can also be transmitted indirectly by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus.

Millions of people contract the flu every year with a percentage suffering complications, hospitalisations, and possibly even death.

There are three main types of influenza virus: Type A, B, and C. Influenza Type A and B are common circulating strains, both globally and in the local community.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Influenza symptoms include high fever, chills, runny nose, blocked nose, cough, sore throat, headache, muscle aches, fatigue, and weakness. It can be difficult to distinguish influenza from Covid-19 based on symptoms alone.

How can I protect myself against the Influenza virus?

The best way to prevent flu is to get vaccinated every year.

You should also practice good personal hygiene like frequent hand washing and wearing a mask if you display flu symptoms.

What flu vaccine does UHC use?

UHC uses the quadrivalent seasonal influenza vaccine. It is a vaccine that targets 4 different influenza strains (2 Type A and 2 Type B).

The southern hemisphere influenza vaccine will be administered for this exercise (25 March to 30 April).

Are the vaccines completely effective for influenza prevention?

No, as with any vaccination, influenza vaccines do not guarantee full protection.

However, it has been shown to reduce the severity of influenza infections and prevent deaths and hospitalisations.

Who should be vaccinated?

According to the National Adult Immunisation Schedule, all adults should have their yearly flu vaccination and especially at-risk individuals.

Flu vaccination is recommended for the following groups who are at increased risk of influenza-related complications:

- Persons aged 65 years or older
- Adults who have chronic medical conditions of the heart, lungs (e.g. asthma), diabetes, liver and kidney disease
- Persons with a compromised immune system
- Adults who are receiving long term aspirin therapy

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- Women at all stages of pregnancy
- Any person/traveller seeking protection against influenza
- Health care workers/staff
- Overweight with BMI > 40
- Household contacts and carers of child younger than 5 years and adults of 50 years old and above

Is the vaccine compulsory?

No, it is not compulsory to be vaccinated. However, it is highly recommended.

Who should not be vaccinated?

The vaccine may not be suitable for you if:

- You have a moderate or severe acute infectious illness (please wait until you have fully recovered from your illness).
- You have had a severe allergic reaction after a dose of seasonal influenza vaccine or have a severe allergy to high protein food (e.g. eggs or chicken protein).

Can I take the influenza vaccine if I have an egg allergy?

Most influenza vaccines contain a small amount of egg protein because the viruses used to make the vaccines are incubated in eggs. However, most people with egg allergies do not develop serious adverse effects after vaccination.

If you are someone with a history of egg allergy and have experienced only mild urticaria (hives) after exposure to egg, or can eat lightly cooked eggs (e.g., scrambled eggs) without reaction, you can be vaccinated. Severe reactions in people with an egg allergy are rare. If you are unsure, please seek your doctor's advice before any vaccination.

Can I take the vaccine if I am currently having a runny nose or sore throat?

Generally, you may proceed with the vaccination if symptoms are mild, such as a cold and sore throat without a fever.

If you are unwell and are unsure of your eligibility, please speak with the doctor before receiving the vaccine.

Do I need to be vaccinated annually? How long does the vaccine protection last?

The influenza virus mutates frequently and strains of the viruses may differ every season/year. This means that the vaccine you had received last season/year may not be as effective for the current influenza strain.

The latest Southern Hemisphere 2024 flu vaccine protects against 4 strains of flu virus namely Influenza A/Victoria (H1N1), Influenza A/Thailand (H3N2) and Influenza B (Austria and Phuket) viruses. Out of the four strains, Influenza A/Thailand (H3N2) was not found in the latest Northern Hemisphere 2023/2024 flu vaccine.

Additionally, a person's immune protection from a vaccination also declines over time. As such, annual influenza vaccinations (or whenever there is a change in the prevailing strain) are recommended to achieve the best possible protection against it.

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I was recently vaccinated. Should I receive another influenza vaccination?

Yes, if you have received the previous influenza vaccine containing a different virus component, you should be vaccinated again even if it is less than 1 year ago.

Are the vaccines safe and effective?

Influenza vaccines have good safety records with extensive research supporting their safe use. An influenza vaccine is the first and best way to reduce your chances of contracting influenza and spreading it to others.

It is recommended that everyone 6 months of age and older receive an influenza vaccination.

All vaccines can cause side effects. Side effects of the influenza vaccine are generally mild and dissipate within a few days. Common side effects may include:

- Soreness, redness, and/or swelling at the injection site
- Headache
- Fever
- Nausea
- Muscle aches

The vaccination procedure, like other injections, can occasionally cause fainting. If you have a history of fainting after vaccination, please inform the nurse.

There is also a possible risk of Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS). GBS is a rare disorder in which your body's immune system attacks your nerves. Weakness and tingling in your extremities are usually the first symptoms. However, studies have shown that the risk for GBS after vaccination to be fewer than 1 or 2 cases per one million people vaccinated.

How can I relieve the discomfort of common side effects such as fever, pain, and swelling that may come after a vaccination?

For relief of fever and possible pain from the vaccination, a mild painkiller medication (e.g. paracetamol) which you are not allergic to may relieve your discomfort.

You can also place a cold, wet cloth over the injection site to help reduce any pain, redness, or swelling.

What signs should prompt me to see the doctor after the vaccination?

Please see a doctor if you experience any of the following:

- When side effects persist for more than a few days.
- A high fever (>38 deg C) or a fever that has persisted for more than 48 hours (2 days) despite taking paracetamol or other pain killers.
- Severe allergic reactions (or anaphylaxis) where you experience difficulties in breathing, itchy skin rash, swelling around lips, eyes, and face, weakness, dizziness, or a fast heart rate.

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Life-threatening allergic reactions to the influenza vaccination are, however, rare. These signs would most likely happen within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccine has been administered.

I am pregnant. Should I be vaccinated?

It is safe and essential for pregnant women to get the vaccine because pregnant women have a higher risk of developing complications from influenza. The vaccination may be done at all stages of pregnancy.

Please Note :

- Pregnant women requesting for the influenza vaccine are required to produce a letter from their consulting specialist which indicates that they are fit to take the vaccine, or to consult a UHC doctor prior to the vaccination.

Will I develop the flu from the vaccination?

The influenza vaccines contain inactivated (killed) viruses.

These dead viruses will not develop into the flu but will trigger your immune system to produce antibodies to protect you against flu.

Can I get the flu after the vaccination?

There are different strains of influenza viruses that circulate and it is still possible to contract influenza even after the vaccination. Vaccination effectiveness depends on the person's age, health, and a "match" of the vaccine to circulating influenza viruses.

How long does it take for the vaccine to work?

Flu vaccines cause protective antibodies to develop in the body within two weeks after vaccination.

Will I be protected against COVID-19 or the common cold after receiving the influenza vaccine?

The vaccine does not confer immunity to COVID-19 but decreases the chance of contracting influenza.

Does the vaccine increase the risk of getting COVID-19?

No, it does not increase the chance of contracting COVID-19.

I have recently taken or am planning to get my COVID-19 vaccination/booster, can I still take my flu vaccination now?

COVID-19 vaccines can now be administered with other vaccines such as the flu vaccine.

COVID-19 vaccine and other vaccines should be given in different sites, if administered together.