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| You never forget the flu, so don’t forget your flu shot |
| Key messages - what you should know about influenza vaccination |

### Use these key messages to help spread the word about the flu vaccination to your network.

The best way to protect yourself and your loved ones against influenza (flu) is to get a flu vaccine every flu season. If you haven’t had your flu shot yet, it’s not too late.

Flu is a contagious respiratory disease that can lead to serious illness, hospitalization, or even death.

Everyone six months and older should get an annual flu vaccine.

## What are some key reasons to get a flu vaccine?

The flu isn’t like the common cold. It can have serious and devastating outcomes.

Each year the flu affects thousands of Victorians and puts an enormous amount of pressure on our hospitals and health system. Over 3,500 avoidable deaths occur in Australia every year from complications of seasonal flu, including pneumonia.

For pregnant women, the flu shot helps protect them from flu illness and hospitalisation. The flu shot also helps protect the baby from flu for several months after birth, before the baby can be vaccinated.

The flu can be particularly severe in people with existing medical conditions, older people and young children. Flu vaccination is an important preventive measure for these groups. If you are in an at-risk group, make sure you get your flu shot.

While some people who get vaccinated still get sick, having the flu shot can help reduce the severity of the illness.

You can think of the influenza vaccine as a seatbelt. When used properly, a seatbelt reduces the likelihood that you’d be injured in a car accident. However, they aren’t perfect and won’t prevent all injuries.

Like a seatbelt, the influenza vaccine isn’t perfect because the flu strain chosen to be in the vaccine each year needs to match the one that is circulating in the community. However, the vaccine will reduce the chance of getting influenza and its potentially serious complications, including death.

## Why is it important to get a flu vaccine every year?

Flu viruses are constantly changing, so flu vaccines may be updated from one season to the next to protect against the viruses that research suggests will be common during the upcoming flu season.

Even if you had the flu shot last year, it’s important that you get it every year to make sure you’re protected for when flu season hits.

## Who is eligible for free flu vaccinations?

All Victorians six months or older are encouraged to get an annual flu shot. If you haven’t had your flu shot this year, it’s not too late.

However, some groups in our community are more vulnerable to the flu virus and can also suffer more serious complications from the flu and are eligible for free influenza vaccination.

All Victorians over aged 65 and over are eligible for a free flu shot that is specially formulated and gives them increased protection.

In Victoria, children aged six months to under five years can get a free flu shot.

Pregnant women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and anyone with a chronic condition or weakened immune system are also eligible for a free flu vaccine.

## Is the flu vaccine safe?

Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to prevent disease worldwide.

The flu shot is safe and effective and doesn’t contain any live virus, so it can’t give you the flu.

Some people may have had the experience of ‘flu-like symptoms’ with a previous flu shot. These may be mild reactions to the vaccine, or a different cold virus or (unluckily) they might have already been incubating flu when they got their shot. The vaccine gives protection about two weeks after the shot.

## When and where to get vaccinated?

It’s never too late to be vaccinated as the flu can spread all year round.

The flu shot is now available from your local GP and community immunisation sessions.

Many of our pharmacies are also able to provide the flu shot to people over 16 years of age, as well as being able to provide advice about the virus.

Many organisations also provide free influenza vaccination sessions for their staff.

## But what’s in the flu vaccine?

The flu shot changes every year to match different strains of the flu that are circulating.

To provide the best possible protection for those 65 years and over, a specially formulated (trivalent) vaccine is recommended for this age group.

Please discuss with your GP or other immunisation provider which vaccine is best for you.

Even if you had the flu shot last year, it’s important that you get it every year to make sure you’re protected for when flu season hits.

## Think you’re fit and healthy and never get the flu?

The flu doesn’t discriminate, anyone can get the flu. Your best possible protection is with the flu shot.

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