

Influenza Vaccine



Why get vaccinated?

Influenza ('flu') is a serious disease. It is caused by a virus that spreads from infected persons to the nose or throat of others. Influenza can cause fever, sore throat, chills, cough, headache and muscle aches.

Anyone can get influenza. Most people are ill with influenza for only a few days, but some get much sicker and may need to be hospitalised. Influenza causes an average of 36,000 deaths yearly, mainly among the elderly. The influenza vaccine can prevent influenza.

Singapore has two influenza season peaks – the Northern Hemisphere peak (Oct-Feb) and the Southern Hemisphere peak (April – July). Singapore sees a peak consistent with both hemispheres, with slightly higher numbers with the Southern peak. Therefore, two vaccines are released annually; a Northern and a Southern. These seek to protect against the strains most likely dominant during the respective flu season.

Influenza vaccine

Inactivated (killed) influenza vaccine has been used for many years. However, influenza viruses change often. Therefore the influenza vaccine is updated each year. Protection develops about two weeks after getting the vaccine and may last up to a year. Some people who get influenza vaccine may still get it, but they will usually get a milder case than those who did not. Influenza vaccines may be given at the same time as other vaccines.



Who should get an inactivated influenza vaccine?

People 6 months of age and older are at risk for getting a serious case of influenza or influenza complications, and people in close contact with them (including all household members) should get the vaccine.

An annual influenza shot is recommended for:

- People 50 years of age or older
- People with long-term health problems like heart disease, kidney disease, lung disease, metabolic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, anaemia and other blood disorders.
- People with a weakened immune system due to HIV/AIDS or another disease that affects the immune system, long-term treatment with drugs such as steroids, cancer treatment with x-rays or drugs.
- People 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin treatment (who could develop Reye Syndrome if they catch influenza).
- Pregnant women who will be past the 3rd month of pregnancy during the flu season.
- Physicians, nurses, family members, or anyone else coming in close contact with people at risk of serious influenza.

An annual influenza shot is also encouraged for:

- Healthy children 6-23 months of age
- Household contacts and out-of-home caretakers of infants from 0-23 months of age, especially those younger than six months
- Frequent travellers (being on a flight increases the risk of catching flu by about four times).
- People who provide essential community services
- People living in dormitories or under other crowded conditions to prevent outbreaks
- Anyone else who wants to reduce their chance of catching influenza





When should I get the influenza vaccine?

The best time to get an influenza vaccine is from October to December for the Northern hemisphere flu season and from April to June for the Southern flu season. The flu season in the Northern hemisphere usually peaks between January and March, while the Southern hemisphere flu season peaks from June to September.

Most people need only one vaccine shot each year to prevent influenza. However, children under nine years old getting the influenza vaccine for the first time should get two shots, one month apart. Those at higher risk should consider getting both annual flu vaccines.

Talk with a doctor before getting an influenza vaccine if you:

- Have a severe allergic reaction to eggs or a previous dose of influenza vaccine
- Have a history of Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS)

If you have a fever or are severely ill when the vaccine is scheduled, you should wait until you recover before getting the influenza vaccine.

What are the risks of inactivated influenza vaccine?

A vaccine, like any medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. However, the risk of a vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is minimal. For example, serious problems from influenza vaccines are very rare. This is because the viruses in the inactivated influenza vaccine have been killed, so you cannot get influenza from the vaccine. However, mild problems such as soreness, redness or swelling where the vaccine was given, and/or fever or aches may occur soon after and last 1–2 days.

Source: CDC

