

## INFLUENZA INFECTION AND VACCINATION

### How does influenza affect me?

- Influenza is a viral respiratory infection that causes fever, muscle and joint pain
- It can cause complications like chest infection, heart inflammation and death
- Adults aged 65 years or older have a higher risk of developing complications after influenza infection
- Between 1 in 5 to 1 in 10 people are infected with influenza every year
- It causes increased hospital admissions in the elderly
- It causes around 3,000 deaths in people older than 50 years each year in Australia

### How does the influenza vaccine help?

- The influenza vaccine is very effective in preventing complications like chest infections, and needing to go to hospital
- Since the immune systems of older adults do not work as well as younger adults, the influenza vaccine may not necessarily prevent infection. However, it will protect you from becoming very unwell from the infection
- To increase the response of older adults' immune system to the influenza vaccine, special influenza vaccines are given to adults aged 65 years and over

### When can I get the free influenza vaccine?

- 65 years and older (non-Indigenous)
- Any age for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- < 65 years old for people with certain medical conditions

### What are common side effects of the influenza vaccine?

- About 1 in 10 people may have swelling, redness or pain at the injection site – this goes away after 2 - 3 days without treatment
- Paracetamol can help with injection site pain
- Sometimes a lump may develop at the injection site and can last for a few weeks or months – this is of no concern and does not need treatment
- Serious side effects are very rare e.g. a type of temporary paralysis may occur in 1 - 2 people for every one million influenza vaccines given (note that this paralysis can also occur after being infected with influenza)
- People with egg or latex allergies can be safely vaccinated with all influenza vaccines

- The immune response of the body after vaccination may result in side effects that are similar to early influenza symptoms (fever, headache, general tiredness or muscle aches) – however, these generally only last for 2 - 3 days and are much milder than the symptoms of actual influenza

### **Can the influenza vaccine give me influenza?**

- No. Influenza vaccines cannot give a person influenza because they do not contain a live virus.

### **Why do I need an influenza vaccination every year?**

- The influenza virus changes every year so, new-season influenza vaccines are developed every year to match the circulating virus, and offer the best protection possible

### **Should I still get the influenza vaccination after I had the infection?**

- Influenza vaccination is still recommended following a recent influenza infection.
- Vaccination can lower the risk of becoming sick from other strains of the influenza virus.
- People who have been unwell with influenza should wait until they have recovered from the acute illness before receiving influenza vaccination.

### **Where can I get more information?**

[Influenza vaccines – frequently asked questions \(FAQs\) | NCIRS](#)