



Australian Government

Department of Health and Aged Care

Chief Medical Officer

NATIONAL IMMUNISATION PROGRAM – 2023 influenza vaccination

Information for providers

KEY MESSAGES

- Annual vaccination is the most important measure to prevent influenza and its complications. It is recommended for all people ≥ 6 months of age.
- Influenza vaccination is particularly important for those most at risk, with the need to focus on improving uptake in children under 5, First Nations people and pregnant women.
- National Immunisation Program (NIP) influenza vaccines will be available to order from April, subject to local supply arrangements.
- Influenza vaccines can be co-administered (given on the same day) with any COVID-19 vaccine.
- It is mandatory to report all influenza vaccines administered to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) both NIP and private vaccines.

Dear Colleague

I am writing to advise that 2023 influenza vaccines under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) will be available to order for eligible patients from April 2023, subject to local supply arrangements. The timing of availability of NIP influenza vaccines may differ from that of privately purchased influenza vaccines.

The influenza vaccine is funded under the NIP for people most at risk, including:

- people aged 65 years and over;
- children aged 6 months to less than 5 years;
- pregnant women;
- people aged 6 months and over with medical conditions that increase their risk of influenza; and
- First Nations people aged 6 months and over.

Annual influenza vaccination should occur from April onwards to provide protection for the peak of the influenza season, which is generally June to September in most parts of Australia. Note though, vaccination can occur as soon as vaccine stock is available.

In 2022, there was a resurgence of influenza arising from the reopening of international borders. In 2023, seasonal influenza activity is expected to continue, and we encourage you to emphasise the importance of influenza vaccination.

I am particularly concerned about influenza in children aged 6 months to less than 5 years. Last year children aged younger than 5 years had the highest influenza notification rates, with only 32 per cent of the cohort receiving a vaccine. This rate was even lower for First Nations children at 21.5 per cent. Increasing uptake of influenza vaccines in children should be a priority

Pregnant women are also more than twice as likely to be admitted to hospital with influenza than non-pregnant women. Influenza vaccination remains lower than it should be among pregnant women. To continue to improve uptake in these at-risk groups, the Australian Government will be running dedicated communication campaigns again this year.

Prepare for the season:

- **Discard expired vaccines** - some influenza vaccine brands expired in December 2022 and others expire on 28 February 2023. Dispose of vaccines in accordance with your local level protocols.
- **Order 2023 vaccines** - NIP influenza vaccines can be ordered through the usual channels in your state or territory. Contact your state or territory immunisation program if you have any questions.
- **Promote the free vaccine to eligible people and priority groups** - a recommendation from a health professional is key to many people taking up a vaccine. Posters, program advice and information cards will be distributed to General Practices and Aboriginal Health Services from April. The 2023 influenza resource collection is available on the Department's website [here](#) with additional resources available to order.
- **Consider opportunities to co-administer vaccines** - influenza vaccines can be co-administered (given on the same day) with any COVID-19 vaccine.
- **Ensure vaccine safety** - always check the patient's age before vaccination and ensure that you use the correct influenza vaccine for their age.
- **Report to the AIR** - you are required to report all influenza vaccines administered to the AIR, both NIP and private vaccines.
- **Keep up to date** - you can get the latest [NIP updates](#) by subscribing to our email list. The Department's influenza information can be accessed from health.gov.au/flu

Providers are strongly encouraged to review the:

- **ATAGI Statement** - administration of seasonal influenza vaccines in 2023 (enclosed).
- **NIP Factsheet** - program advice for vaccination providers on influenza vaccination 2023 (enclosed).
- **NIP Schedule** - the schedule has been updated to incorporate influenza vaccination across the schedule to ensure eligible patients can be easily identified (enclosed).

Yours sincerely



Professor Paul Kelly
Chief Medical Officer

22 February 2023