



# Is an influenza vaccine recommended for my child?

 SKAI : Sharing Knowledge About Immunisation

**If your child is six months or older, it is recommended they get an influenza vaccine every year. Influenza vaccines are free for all children from six months up to five years, and are the best way to protect your child against influenza, sometimes called 'the flu'.**

An influenza vaccine protects your child against several types of influenza virus. It is given as a needle, usually in the leg or arm. The best time to get the vaccine is before the influenza season, which is usually June to September.

## Is influenza serious?

If your child has influenza, they will probably have a fever and a dry cough, a blocked nose, sneezing, headache and a sore throat. They may look and feel tired. They might have an upset tummy, and their muscles might feel sore.<sup>1</sup> Even though some of the symptoms are similar, influenza is usually much worse and lasts longer than a cold. Even if your child is usually healthy, influenza can make them very unwell. Influenza can lead to serious conditions like severe lung infection or swelling in the brain. Babies and children under five years of age are more likely than older children and adults to get severe influenza and need treatment in hospital.<sup>2</sup>

## Is influenza common in Australia?

Influenza is common: up to four in 10 children in Australia get influenza each year.<sup>1</sup> Influenza can spread more easily in places where children spend lots of time together, like childcare centres, playgroups or schools. When someone with influenza sneezes or coughs, they send tiny droplets carrying the influenza virus into the air. If your child breathes in these droplets, or touches a surface where they have landed and then touches their nose, mouth or eyes, they can catch influenza too.

## How often should my child get an influenza vaccine?

Children need to get an influenza vaccine every year. This is because the types of influenza viruses circulating often change from year to year. Also, protection from influenza vaccines generally lasts less than a year.

## How will my child feel after vaccination?

Immediately after they get an injection, most children will cry for a minute or two. You can help them feel better by cuddling them, breastfeeding them or keeping them distracted with a toy or an activity that they enjoy. For a day or two afterwards, some children will feel a little unwell. The most common reactions are redness, soreness or swelling at the spot where the needle went in, mild fever (temperature), slight headache, feeling achy, and tiredness.<sup>1</sup> Usually these symptoms last between 12 and 24 hours and then get better. **If you are worried about your child, you can get help from your doctor or your nearest emergency department. You can also call Health Direct on 1800 022 222.**

## Are there any rare side effects I need to know about?

Serious side effects can happen but they are very rare. Less than two in every 100,000 children under two years of age experience fits or seizures (febrile convulsions) after influenza vaccination.<sup>3</sup> This can happen when a child's temperature (fever) goes up very quickly. Children are more likely to get a fever and have fits from influenza itself. In one study, four in every 100 children treated in hospital for influenza had a febrile convulsion.<sup>4</sup>

About one in every one million children has a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to one of the vaccine ingredients.<sup>5</sup> If this happens, it will usually occur before you and your child leave the clinic. Your doctor or nurse knows what to do to treat a child having an anaphylactic reaction so they can recover quickly.

Guillain–Barré syndrome is a rare disorder where the immune system damages nerve cells. Less than one in every one million people who get an influenza vaccine are affected by the disorder, and older adults, not children, are at most risk. Influenza infection is more likely to cause Guillain–Barré syndrome than the vaccine.<sup>6</sup>

## When do we come back for more vaccinations?

The first time your child gets an influenza vaccine, they will need a second dose four weeks later. This strengthens their immunity to influenza viruses. The second year your child gets an influenza vaccine (and every year after that), they will only need one dose. If your child's age-specific vaccinations are due just before the influenza season (usually June to September), they can get these vaccines and an influenza vaccine at the same appointment.

## Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information about influenza vaccination you can:

- go to the SKAI website, [talkingaboutimmunisation.org.au](http://talkingaboutimmunisation.org.au)
- write your questions in the space below and ask your doctor or nurse when you see them.

## What questions do you have before your child gets an influenza vaccine?

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I have no questions

### References

1. National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance. Influenza vaccines for Australians (NCIRS Fact sheet). National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance: Sydney, Australia.
2. Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), Australian Immunisation Handbook. 2018, Australian Government Department of Health: Canberra.
3. Hambidge, S.J., et al., Safety of Trivalent Inactivated Influenza Vaccine in Children 6 to 23 Months Old. JAMA, 2006. 296(16): p. 1990-1997.
4. Dawood, F.S., et al., Complications and associated bacterial coinfections among children hospitalized with seasonal or pandemic influenza, United States, 2003-2010.(Report). Journal of Infectious Diseases, 2014. 209(5): p. 686.
5. Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA), Guidelines: vaccination of the egg-allergic individual. 2017, ASCIA: Sydney, Australia.
6. National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance. Influenza vaccines - Frequently Asked Questions (NCIRS Fact sheet). NCIRS: Sydney, Australia.

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