

Flu Fact Sheet

What is Influenza?

Influenza (flu) is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by the flu virus.

It is usually a more severe illness than the 'common cold'.

What are the symptoms?

Flu symptoms include some or all of the following:

- Fever and chills.
- Dry cough, sore throat, running nose.
- Muscle aches and pains, headache and fatigue (feeling very tired).

Most people recover from flu in less than a week.

- Complications of the flu, such as pneumonia, do occur – particularly in older people or those with a chronic illness. Severe or worsening flu symptoms should be assessed by a doctor.

How is it spread?

The flu virus spreads easily when infected people cough or sneeze without covering their mouths and noses.

It can also be passed on through touching surfaces where infected droplets have landed.

The flu virus can live for up to five minutes on the hand and up to a day on hard surfaces.

It then takes one to three days for the person to start feeling unwell.

People can pass on the virus from a day before symptoms start, and for up to seven days after symptoms start.

How is it diagnosed?

Flu may be diagnosed based on your symptoms and can be confirmed by testing a sample of fluid taken from the back of the nose and throat or a blood test.

How is it treated?

- Symptoms can be managed by rest.
- Paracetamol can help lower your fever and relieve your headache and muscle aches. Follow instructions carefully.
- Antiviral medications can reduce the severity and the duration of influenza but need to be taken within 48 hours of the first symptoms. These medicines need to be prescribed by a doctor, and are usually considered for people at higher risk of complications from flu infection.

How is it prevented?

Having a flu vaccine each year is the best way to prevent flu.

If you get sick – **don't share it!**

- Cover your face when you cough or sneeze with your elbow or a tissue and throw used tissues in a rubbish bin.

- Wash your hands thoroughly and often. Wash hands for at least 10 seconds, especially after coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose, or use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Stay at home until you're well. Wait at least 24 hours after your fever resolves so you that you are unlikely to infect other people. Keep sick children away from school and other activities.
- **Call ahead to see a doctor.** This will allow the medical service to plan your visit to prevent the infection spreading to others.
- Other chronic illnesses requiring regular medical follow up or hospitalisation in the previous year, including diabetes mellitus, chronic metabolic diseases, chronic renal failure, and haemoglobinopathies.
- Chronic neurological conditions that impact on respiratory function, including multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries, and seizure disorders.
- Impaired immunity, including HIV, malignancy and chronic steroid use.
- Children aged 6 months to 10 years on long term aspirin therapy.

Who should get immunised?

You need flu vaccine every year to stay protected.

Anyone can get flu, but the following people are at higher risk of getting severe flu and complications from influenza infection. These people are eligible for free annual flu vaccine:

- All individuals aged 65 years or older.
- All Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people aged 6 months to <5 years or aged 15 years and older.
- Pregnant women (any stage of pregnancy).

Adults and children from six months of age with chronic medical conditions including:

- Cardiac disease, including cyanotic congenital heart disease, coronary artery disease and congestive heart failure.
- Chronic respiratory conditions, including suppurative lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and severe asthma.

Free vaccine is available for these groups through GPs and other immunisation providers. A consultation fee may apply.

People who care for or come into contact with those at risk of severe flu should also be vaccinated. This includes healthcare workers, childcare workers, and other people who live or work with vulnerable people.

Are there any side effects associated with the flu vaccine?

Common side effects of flu vaccination include pain and swelling at the injection site. Fever is less common. These side effects are usually mild and resolve quickly without any treatment.

The seasonal flu vaccine cannot give you the flu.

If you have any concerns or queries about the flu vaccine, please discuss with your GP.

For more information

Call the Public Health Hotline – Tasmania on **1800 671 738** to speak to a clinical nurse consultant.

- [Flu vaccination advice for pregnant women](#)
- [fluTAS Reports](#)
- [Tasmanian Health Action Plan for Pandemic Influenza 2016](#)