



Influenza vaccinations

Factsheet for IAHA members

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, additional emphasis is being placed on the seasonal influenza (flu) vaccination as a method to reduce the pressure on health services and limit the effects of the flu on individuals and communities.

The *Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Management Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations* states that “influenza vaccination should be strongly promoted by ACCHS and other health care settings serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people”.¹

IAHA support individual agency and self-determination and the following information is intended to support IAHA members to make informed decisions.

Benefits

Social distancing measures and other precautions initiated through the COVID-19 response have had a secondary effect of reducing transmission of influenza in the early months of the flu ‘season’ due to similarities in the transmission of these two items. While measures such as good hygiene practices are important, the flu vaccine is considered an important strategy to:

- Reduce the duration and severity of flu symptoms through a more effective immune response;
- Reduce transmission of the flu, particularly for vulnerable and at risk groups including those who are unable to receive a vaccine themselves;
- Reduce the risk of potential adverse outcomes in persons who may be diagnosed with COVID-19;
- Reduce confusion regarding diagnosis of influenza and COVID-19 cases; and
- Reduce the strain on the health care system by limiting concurrent presentations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For many of these same reasons, the pneumococcal vaccine also available to certain higher risk cohorts.

Background information on the flu vaccine

All flu vaccines used in Australia are ‘inactivated’, which means they do not contain the live flu virus and so you cannot catch the flu from the vaccine.

Some people experience side effects from the flu shot that are similar to the early

¹ <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/03/management-plan-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-populations.pdf>

signs of the flu. These may include fever, tiredness and muscle aches. It's important to remember that the side effects show the vaccine is triggering an immune response, which is what it is designed to do. Side effects may start within a few hours of you being vaccinated and sometimes last for 1 or 2 days. They usually go away on their own, once your body has developed an immune response to the vaccine, which will protect you from the flu virus.²

Each year, the vaccine contains several (three or four) inactivated strains of the virus which are recommended based on those which are in circulation during the prior northern hemisphere winter. The effectiveness of the vaccine depends, in part, on how closely the southern hemisphere season mirrors that of the northern hemisphere.

More information on the recommendations for the 2020 southern hemisphere vaccine recommendation is available via the World Health Organisation [website](#).

Information for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce

Under the National Immunisation Program, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the age of six months are eligible for a free flu vaccine.³ This is in recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be at a higher risk of adverse health outcomes, due to existing health inequities, although individual health status is an important consideration.

IAHA recognise that influenza vaccinations have traditionally been a decision for individuals although employers, particularly in health, may encourage staff to maintain currency of vaccinations to reduce risks to staff and/or patients and clients, particularly those who may be at risk of immunocompromised. Some of the benefits of receiving the flu vaccination are outlined below.

Informed consent, including the benefits and any limitations of the vaccine, should form the basis of all flu vaccination programs and campaigns. Flu vaccine compliance as a pre-requisite for employment or educational attendance would need to be carefully considered in terms of benefits and risks given the existing impact of the social determinants of health.

Disclaimer: Please note that Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) provide this information in good faith and to support the informed decision making of IAHA members. It is not intended to replace advice from primary care providers.

² <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/flu-vaccine-faqs>

³ <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/immunisation-throughout-life/national-immunisation-program-schedule#flu-influenza-vaccines>