



# WINTER VACCINATIONS FOR OLDER PEOPLE

## YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Information about vaccines to protect against influenza (flu), COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) this winter.

### What is influenza (flu)?

Flu is a contagious infection of the airways, caused by the influenza virus. It's different from the common cold. It affects people of all ages, but older adults and people with underlying health conditions are more at risk of serious illness from infection. Vaccination reduces the risk of severe disease and death from the flu.

### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a highly contagious respiratory disease that spreads when a person coughs, sneezes, talks or breathes. It affects people of all ages, but older adults and those with underlying health conditions are at greater risk of serious, long-term complications from infection. Vaccination reduces the risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19.

### What is respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)?

RSV is a common, highly contagious virus that infects the airways and lungs. It affects people of all ages, but older adults and those with underlying health conditions are at greater risk of serious illness from infection.

Vaccination reduces the risk of severe disease and death from RSV.

### Why should I get vaccinated?

Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to protect against serious illness, hospitalisation and death caused by respiratory viruses such as influenza (flu), COVID-19 and RSV. These illnesses can be severe even in otherwise healthy people.

Older adults are at greater risk of becoming seriously ill or needing hospital treatment from flu and COVID-19. For RSV, the risk of severe disease increases further with age, particularly from 75 years. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the risk of severe RSV disease increases from 60 years.

Viruses like influenza and COVID-19 continue to change over time so the vaccines are updated to protect against the latest variants.



## Who should get winter vaccinations?

Flu, COVID-19 and RSV are recommended for different people, based on age, health conditions and risk of severe illness.

- **Flu vaccines** are recommended and free for people aged 65 years and over and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over.
- **COVID-19 vaccines** are recommended every 12 months for people aged 65 to 74 years and every 6 months for people 75 years and older. For others, an updated vaccine may be recommended or considered after discussing with a health professional.
- **The RSV vaccine** is recommended for adults aged 75 and over and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 60 years and over.

Talk to your GP, pharmacist or health service about which winter vaccines are recommended for you and when to have them.

## Are winter vaccines free?

Winter vaccines are free depending on the vaccine and your age:

- COVID-19 vaccines are provided free to all people in Australia under the National COVID-19 Vaccine Program.
- Flu and RSV vaccines are funded for specific groups under the National Immunisation Program, so many eligible people can receive the vaccines at no cost. However, a consultation or service fee may apply.

Some states and territories also fund flu vaccines for additional groups. If you're not eligible for a free vaccine, you can buy the vaccine. The best way to know what's free for you is to check with your GP, pharmacist or health service. You can also find more information at [health.gov.au/winter-vaccinations](https://www.health.gov.au/winter-vaccinations).

## How often should I get vaccinated?

Vaccination frequency depends on the vaccine and your risk. Flu vaccine is recommended annually, COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for specific groups every 6 to 12 months, and RSV is usually a one-off dose.

## When should I get vaccinated?

Vaccination is recommended before the cooler months, when respiratory viruses are more common. But it is never too late to get vaccinated. You do not need to wait 6 months after a COVID-19 infection to receive a vaccine dose.

In Australia, RSV and influenza seasons can start as early as March, with activity usually peaking between June and September. Getting vaccinated before winter gives you the best protection during this higher risk period. Your health professional can help you decide the best timing based on your health, vaccination history, and local virus activity.

## I've already had a flu or COVID-19 vaccine – am I protected?

Vaccination provides protection against serious illness, but this protection decreases over time. Getting recommended flu and COVID-19 vaccines can help reduce your risk of becoming very unwell if you are exposed to a newer strain – especially if you are older or have health conditions that increase your risk.

The best way to know if flu or COVID-19 vaccines are recommended for you is to talk with your GP, pharmacist or health service.

## Can I get the flu, COVID-19 and RSV vaccines at the same time?

Yes, you can get flu, COVID-19, and RSV vaccines at the same appointment or separately. Speak with your doctor about what is recommended for you.

## Are vaccines safe?

All vaccines available in Australia have been assessed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to make sure they are safe and effective before being approved for use. The TGA keeps monitoring safety while vaccines are being used.

All vaccines used in Australia provide benefits that far outweigh any risks. It's much safer to be vaccinated than get the disease.

## What are the side effects of these vaccines?

Most people experience only mild side effects after vaccination, such as a sore arm or feeling tired for a short time. Serious side effects are rare. If you have concerns, ask your vaccination provider about potential side effects.

## Where can I get vaccinated?

You can get winter vaccinations from a range of vaccination providers across Australia.

Vaccination providers include:



general practices



participating pharmacies



local council immunisation clinics (available in some states and territories)



community health centres



Aboriginal medical services



residential aged care vaccination providers (for people living in aged care).

You can find a health service near you by visiting [healthdirect.gov.au](http://healthdirect.gov.au).

## How can I check my vaccination record?

Your health professional will record your vaccinations on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

You can get your Immunisation History Statement from the AIR by:

- visiting [my.gov.au](http://my.gov.au) and signing in to access your Medicare online account or using the myGov mobile app
- calling Services Australia on 1800 653 809 to request a copy
- asking your vaccination provider to print a copy for you.



## Where can I find more information?

Talk to your health professional about free winter vaccinations or visit [health.gov.au/winter-vaccinations](http://health.gov.au/winter-vaccinations)