



# Should your child get the Flu vaccine?

## 1 Information

### A DECISION AID FOR AUSTRALIAN FAMILIES

#### What is influenza or “the flu”?

Commonly known as ‘the flu’, influenza is a highly contagious disease that can be serious, debilitating and affect the whole body. The flu is caused by a particular group of viruses and is spread by infected people coughing or sneezing as well as from surfaces contaminated by respiratory droplets. Even laughing, talking and breathing can spread the flu virus. Influenza can cause serious illness in young children and can lead to severe complications in people with underlying medical conditions, older adults and pregnant women. Many people confuse the common cold with influenza; however, influenza is much more severe.

#### How serious is seasonal influenza?

Influenza is a potentially fatal disease that is estimated to cause more deaths than accidents on roads in Australia: **between 1500 and 3500 influenza deaths annually**

Experts estimate that influenza in Australia causes more than **18,000 hospital admissions and 300,000 visits to the GP each year**

Compared with 10-30% in adults **up to 70% of children contract the virus during pandemic years**

**Children** can become severely unwell with influenza infection and **have the highest rates of admission to intensive care units**

Of all vaccine preventable diseases, **influenza is the leading cause of hospitalisation among Australian children under five years of age**. Each year nearly 1500 Australian children are hospitalized for influenza. When compared to other disease among children under 5 years of age, influenza causes:

**4X** more hospitalisations than meningococcal disease

More than **3X** more hospitalisation than pneumococcal disease

**2X** the number of hospitalisation than chickenpox

In fact local and international data indicates that children under 5 are more likely than any other group to present to Emergency Departments. Young children hospitalised with influenza can spend anywhere between a few days to a couple of weeks in hospital recovering. Children are also the main spreaders of influenza, particularly within households. Vaccination is not only important to protect the child but also to protect other at risk people or older adults they are in contact with.



This decision aid is aiming to provide adequate information for you to help you decide whether to immunise your child with the influenza (Flu) vaccine.

#### How contagious is influenza?

Studies have shown that influenza can survive for:

**8**  
**HRS+**  
on hard surfaces such as stainless steel and plastic

Adults can be contagious one day before getting symptoms and up to 5 days after becoming ill. This means that you can spread the influenza virus before you know you are infected. For children these periods are usually even longer.

**1**  
**HR+**  
in the air in enclosed environments

**UP TO 15**  
**MIN**  
if transferred from tissue to hand

**UP TO 5**  
**MIN**  
after transfer from environmental surfaces

## Sometimes people say: “I have the flu”, when they really have a cold.

FLU	COLD
Generally, flu symptoms are more severe than cold symptoms, such as extreme exhaustion and aching muscles. Symptoms of the flu include:	Cold symptoms are generally milder than flu symptoms. You might just have a cold if your symptoms include:
<b>A fever of over 37.8°C, chills, or a feverish feeling</b>	<b>Sore throat that lasts one to two days</b>
<b>Body aches, headache, and fatigue</b>	<b>Runny nose and nasal congestion</b>
<b>Sore throat and/or cough</b>	<b>Post-nasal drip related cough</b>
<b>Stuffy and/or runny nose</b>	<b>Slight fever, especially in children</b>
<b>In children, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea</b>	Symptoms are likely to improve within five days to a week, unless your cold is complicated by a bacterial infection or sinusitis.
Flu symptoms can start to subside in as little as two to five days, but you're more likely to be out of commission for at least a week, and up to two weeks.	

### What happened in 2010 following influenza vaccines?

During the 2010 influenza season an unexpected number of febrile reactions and febrile convulsions occurred in children under 5 years of age following immunisation with one of the registered seasonal trivalent influenza vaccines. This vaccine brand is no longer licensed for children  $\leq 5$  years of age and is not recommended if there is an alternative vaccine available for those aged  $\geq 5$  to  $\leq 10$  years.

After an extensive safety review, 4 other vaccine brands have been approved by the Therapeutics Goods Administration for use in children over the age of 6 months. There is active monitoring of these other influenza vaccine brands for any increase in fever or febrile convulsions in children aged  $\geq 6$  months to  $< 5$  years of age.

[www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/Publishing.nsf/content/ATAGI-advice-TIV-march2013](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/Publishing.nsf/content/ATAGI-advice-TIV-march2013)

## The influenza vaccine

The influenza vaccine is made from purified influenza viruses that have been killed and broken into small pieces. These tiny non-living pieces of the virus are enough to fool your body into believing it has been invaded or attacked so it produces antibodies. These antibodies then remain in your body to fight a real influenza virus in the future.

The vaccine cannot give you the flu as it doesn't contain any live viruses.

The types of influenza viruses circulating in the community frequently change from year to year. This means that the influenza viruses used in the vaccine can change from year to year as well. Also, the immunity provided by current vaccines begin to fade after a year. This is why it is important to have an annual influenza vaccination to keep up to date with the current circulating viruses and keep your immunity high. Annual vaccination is the single, most effective way to minimise the risk of contracting the disease.

Children 6 months to 3 years receive a half dose of the vaccine (0.25ml). 3 years and older receive a full dose (0.5ml). It is recommended that children  $\geq 6$  months to  $\leq 9$  years of age receive two doses of the influenza vaccine (minimum 1 month apart) in the first year they receive the vaccine (one dose each year thereafter).

**Note: The influenza vaccine does contain trace amounts of egg protein. For people with severe egg allergies (e.g. anaphylaxis), flu vaccination should be discussed with their doctor and referred to an allergy specialist.**

## How can you protect yourself and your family from the flu?



*Clean your hands frequently using an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water*



*Cough and sneeze into a tissue, not your hand. Throw the tissue out right away and wash your hands. If you don't have a tissue, sneeze or cough into your sleeve or arm*



*Don't share things that go in the mouth*



*Stay home if you are ill and do not return to school/day-care/work/other group activities until you are feeling well enough to take part again*



*Protect your child from influenza with the flu vaccine*

## 2 What are your options?



**Take the influenza vaccine**

**Wait until there is an outbreak of the flu**



**Decline the influenza vaccine**

### What other health factors may affect your choice?

You should talk to your doctor BEFORE you decide about the vaccine if you answer "Yes" to any of the following statements. Please check ✓

Your child:	Yes	No
...is older than 6 months and younger than 5 years of age?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...has a chronic health condition?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...has a problem with his/her immune system (due to a disease or medication)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...has a severe egg allergy or an allergy to a vaccine component?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...acutely unwell with fever and respiratory symptoms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...other medical conditions of your child that concern you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have no medical concerns about the flu shot.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Step 1: What are the benefits and side effects of the flu shot?

This information may change as more research becomes available. There is no way of knowing exactly how you or your family member might be affected.

#### BENEFITS

- Children and adults who **take flu vaccine** are less likely to get a flu infection
- Children and adults who **take the flu vaccine** are less sick if they get an flu infection
- Children and adults who take the flu shot are less likely to require hospitalisation, admission to an ICU or to die from the effects of influenza

#### SIDE EFFECTS FROM THE FLU VACCINE

- People who take the flu vaccine can develop pain at the injection site, which can last 1 to 6 days
- People who take the flu vaccine occasionally develop nausea, fatigue, muscle aches, fever, and/or headache, which generally last for around one day

Serious side effects of the flu shots are extremely rare. If your child has had a reaction post an influenza vaccine, or you are worried about reactions, every state in Australia has a vaccine safety reporting system. Reactions to any vaccines are documented on the national Therapeutic Goods Administration website. This is regularly updated and can also be discussed with your immunisation provider.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION FOR NOTIFICATION OF ADVERSE EVENTS FOLLOWING IMMUNISATION:

<b>ACT</b>	ACT Health Dept.	<b>02 6205 2300</b>
<b>NSW</b>	NSW Public Health Units	Contact your local Public Health Unit, found under 'Health' in the White Pages
<b>NT</b>	NT Dept. of Health	<b>08 8922 8044</b>
<b>QLD</b>	Queensland Health	Complete an AEFT initial report form available at <a href="http://www.health.qld.gov.au/immunisation">www.health.qld.gov.au/immunisation</a> or by phoning <b>07 3328 9888</b> . Fax completed form to the number provided on it.
<b>SA</b>	Immunisation Section, Dept. for Health and Ageing	<b>1300 232 272</b>
<b>TAS</b>	Direct to the TGA	<b>1800 044 114</b> or complete the 'Blue card' ( <a href="http://www.tga.gov.au/safety/problem-medicine-report-adr.htm">www.tga.gov.au/safety/problem-medicine-report-adr.htm</a> )w
<b>VIC</b>	SAEFVIC	<b>03 9345 4143</b> or on-line at <a href="http://www.saefvic.org.au">www.saefvic.org.au</a>
<b>WA</b>	State Health Dept., WAVSS	<b>03 9321 1312</b> or on-line at <a href="http://wavss.health.wa.gov.au">wavss.health.wa.gov.au</a>

## Step 2: Which reasons to choose each option matter most to you?

For each question circle how much each reason matters to you on a scale from 0 to 5 – '0' means it is not important to you. '5' means it is very important to you.

### REASONS TO TAKE THE FLU VACCINE – How important is it that you and/or your child...

	Not important			Very important		
...do not get influenza and avoids missing time from school and family by being sick? Or you missing time from work because your child is sick?	0	1	2	3	4	5
...avoid the cost, potential side-effects and potential difficulty of getting the antiviral medication if your child develops flu symptoms?	0	1	2	3	4	5
...do not become seriously ill with influenza and you can avoid hospitalisation of your child and possible intensive care or death?	0	1	2	3	4	5

### REASONS TO DECLINE THE FLU VACCINE – How important is it that you and/or your child...

	Not important			Very important		
...avoid the inconvenience of arranging to get the flu vaccine, including lining up for the vaccine and/or taking time off work/school?	0	1	2	3	4	5
...wait until there is more information about the safety of the flu vaccine?	0	1	2	3	4	5
...avoid side effects of the flu vaccine?	0	1	2	3	4	5
Other:	0	1	2	3	4	5

### THINKING ABOUT THE REASONS THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU, THE OPTION YOU PREFER FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD IS:

## Step 3: What else do you need to prepare for decision-making?

### HOW WELL DID THIS DECISION AID HELP YOU LEARN THE KEY FACTS?

Which option has the lowest chance of **getting the flu**?

FLU SHOT	DECLINE FLU SHOT	DON'T KNOW
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Which option has the lowest chance of **hospitalisation, ICU admission, or death**?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Which option has the highest chance of **a sore arm as a side effect**?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Which option has the highest chance of **your child not getting influenza and avoid missing time from school by being sick or you missing time of work because your child is sick**?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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KNOWLEDGE: Do you know enough about the benefits and side effects of each option?

YES  NO

SUPPORT: Do you have enough support and advice from others to make a choice?

YES  NO

VALUES: Are you clear about which benefits and side effects matter most to you?

CERTAINTY: Do you feel sure about the best choice for you?

## Step 4: What are the next steps?

I have decided that my child will take the flu vaccine.

I need to discuss the options with my doctor and family.

I have decided that my child will decline the flu vaccine.

I need to read more about my options.

Other: .....

If you want to learn more about influenza or the flu or check the references for the facts and figures in this document please go to [www.isg.org.au](http://www.isg.org.au). **This information is not intended to replace the advice of a health care provider.** Content editors: Dr Alan Hampson, Chairman of the ISG, BSc, MSc, M.D.(Hon), FASM, OAM and Dr Nigel Crawford, General Paediatrician, Medical Head, Immunisation Services RCH, Deputy Director SAEFVIC MCRI. Format based on the Ottawa Personal Decision Guide © 2000, A O'Connor, D Stacey, University of Ottawa, Canada. Published by the Influenza Specialist Group 2013, Suite 1222, 1 Queens Road, Melbourne, Victoria 3004 T: 03 98638651 E: [Info@isg.org.au](mailto:Info@isg.org.au)

The Influenza Specialist Group (ISG) is a not for profit organisation, consisting of medical and scientific specialists from around Australia and New Zealand, with an expertise in influenza.

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