

# Flu facts

## What is flu?

Flu is a virus (influenza) that causes an infection of the respiratory system (nose, throat and lungs).

There are other viruses that also affect the respiratory system and are common over colder months. These cause the “common cold”, which is different to the flu. “Coronavirus” (COVID-19) also affects the respiratory system and can have similar symptoms to the flu, but it is caused by a different virus.

## What are the symptoms?

Flu symptoms often start with fever, muscle aches and fatigue, together with headache, cough and sore throat.

Complications of the flu, such as pneumonia, can be life threatening particularly for older people or those with certain medical conditions.

## 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 contact with contaminated surfaces. The flu virus can live for up to five minutes on hands and up to a day on hard surfaces.

It then takes between one and four days for the person to start feeling unwell. People can pass on the virus from a day before symptoms start until one week after the start of symptoms.

Children and people with impaired immunity may pass the virus on for longer.

## How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor may suspect flu based on your symptoms.

It is difficult to tell the flu apart from COVID-19, and your doctor will likely send you for a test to swab your nose and throat for COVID-19. They may also swab your nose and throat to test for other respiratory illnesses, like the flu.

## How is it treated?

- Rest, stay home and avoid contact with other people except to get medical care.
- Paracetamol can help lower your fever and relieve headache and muscle aches. Follow the instructions carefully on how much to take.
- See your doctor if you are concerned that your symptoms are getting worse.
- Your doctor may choose to prescribe antiviral medication. These are only used in certain circumstances and your doctor will decide when they should be used.

## How is flu prevented?

There are several ways to reduce your chances of catching flu:

- getting the flu vaccine every year helps protect you from flu
- it will also help protect your family, friends and colleagues
- wash your hands often to get rid of the germs you may have picked up. Use soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub.

## **If you get sick - don't share it!**

- When you cough or sneeze cover your mouth with your elbow (rather than your hand).
- Stay home from work. Let someone know you are sick. If your child is unwell keep them at home from childcare or school.
- Avoid visiting people who are likely to get really unwell from flu, including infants and young children, pregnant women, those with medical problems and the elderly.
- Avoid visiting family or friends in hospital or aged-care homes.
- Stay at least 1.5 metres away from other people especially when coughing.
- Call ahead if you need to see a doctor. This will allow the medical service to plan your visit to prevent infection spreading to others.

## **Who should get a vaccine?**

All Tasmanians should consider protecting themselves, their family and their community from flu by having a flu vaccine.

The flu season usually occurs each year in Tasmania between June and September. It is best to have a flu vaccine from mid-April. You need a flu vaccine every year to stay protected.

The following people are eligible for a free flu vaccine because they are at greater risk of getting severe flu and complications:

- all children aged from six months to less than five years
- all adults aged 65 years and over
- pregnant women at any stage in their pregnancy
- Adults and children aged from 6 months with chronic medical conditions such as heart, lung, liver or kidney disease, severe asthma, diabetes, cancer, impaired immunity and neuromuscular conditions.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 6 months of age.

Free vaccine is available for these people through General Practitioners (GPs). A consultation fee may apply.

Healthcare workers, child-care workers and other people who live or work with vulnerable people should also get a flu vaccine to protect themselves, and the vulnerable people they work with.

Tasmanians who are not eligible for a free flu vaccine can purchase a flu vaccine with a prescription from their GP, or privately through many Tasmanian pharmacies.

## **Flu vaccine and COVID-19 vaccines**

COVID-19 vaccines have been introduced in 2021. It is not currently recommended to have a flu vaccine and a COVID-19 vaccine on the same day. For more information on how to get vaccinated against flu during the COVID-19 rollout, speak with your GP, or visit [www.flu.tas.gov.au](http://www.flu.tas.gov.au) and read the section on flu vaccines and COVID-19.

## **Are there any side effects associated with the flu vaccine?**

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

It is not possible for the flu vaccine to give you the flu. There is no live virus in the vaccines used in Australia.

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

## **For more information**

- See the DoH flu website [www.flu.tas.gov.au](http://www.flu.tas.gov.au)
- Call the Public Health Hotline on **1800 671 738**
- Call Immunise Australia on 1800 671 811 or <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/flu-influenza>
- <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/immunisation/immunisation-services/flu-influenza-immunisation-service-0>