Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**

Influenza vaccination for children and adolescents – Information for WA parents and carers

About influenza

Influenza (flu) is a highly contagious virus that can make your child very sick, even if they are normally healthy. Symptoms usually begin suddenly and may include fever, chills, headache, a dry cough, sore throat and feeling tired or weak.

Influenza can lead to dehydration and complications like pneumonia or bronchitis. In some cases, more serious problems can occur, including bacterial infections or issues affecting the heart, blood or nervous system, such as swelling of the brain (encephalitis).

Babies and children under 5 years old are more likely to get severe influenza and need treatment in hospital.

Influenza is different from the common cold and COVID-19. Each year, hundreds of children in WA are admitted to hospital with influenza, and many more need emergency care or a visit to their general practitioner (GP). Sadly, influenza-related child deaths occur each year in WA.

Why influenza vaccination matters (and when it matters most)

Influenza changes every year, so the influenza vaccine is updated to provide protection against the most common strains. That is why it's important to get an influenza vaccine each year. Some influenza strains can affect certain age groups more than others.

Getting an influenza vaccination is the best way to protect children during winter and helps reduce the risk of severe illness and complications. Influenza vaccines are recommended for everyone aged 6 months and older as it can affect people of all ages.

The best time to get vaccinated is before winter and as soon as vaccines are available.

Influenza vaccine options for children in WA

There are 2 types of influenza vaccine available for children and adolescents:

1. nasal spray influenza vaccine
2. injectable (needle) influenza vaccine

The type of vaccine your child can have depends on their **age and health needs**. Speak to your immunisation provider about the best vaccine option for your child. Both vaccine options work equally well. Both the nasal spray and needle vaccines can be safely given at the same time as regular (scheduled) childhood immunisations.

Nasal spray influenza vaccine

The nasal spray influenza vaccine is given using a small applicator placed inside your child's nostril. One spray is given in each nostril. There are no needles involved. It is quick, easy and painless.

The vaccine is absorbed quickly, so even if the child sneezes, they won't need another dose.

If your child has severe asthma (wheezing) or a runny or blocked nose, speak to your immunisation provider, who can help you choose the best option for your child.

Considerations for faith-based concerns regarding porcine gelatine content in LAIV

Nasal spray influenza vaccine contains a highly processed form of porcine gelatine as a stabiliser to protect the live viruses from the effects of temperature. The gelatine used in live vaccines is highly purified and broken down, and differs from the gelatine used in food products.

Many religious authorities, including representatives from Islamic and Jewish communities, have issued guidance supporting the use of porcine-derived gelatine in vaccines.

Families who prefer to avoid porcine-derived gelatine, can opt for a needle-based influenza vaccine.

Where to get immunised

Depending on your child's age, and influenza vaccine availability, influenza vaccines can be received at:

- general practices
- pharmacies (for children aged 2 years and older)
- community immunisation clinics
- Aboriginal Medical Services.

Some immunisation providers may charge a consultation fee for administering the vaccine. You should check if there are any costs and if the vaccine is available when making an appointment with your chosen immunisation provider.

Eligibility can change depending on your child's health needs. Your immunisation provider will review your child's medical history and advise which vaccine option is most suitable.

Vaccine safety

The influenza vaccine has been used for many decades and has a strong safety record.

All influenza vaccines used in WA, including the nasal spray vaccine, are approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). This approval follows careful review of clinical trial results, manufacturing quality and ongoing monitoring.

Vaccine safety is monitored each year through national and state surveillance systems, including AusVaxSafety and the WA Vaccine Safety Surveillance (WAVSS) system.

The nasal spray influenza vaccine has been used safely in children internationally for many years.

Possible side effects

Most side effects from the influenza vaccine are mild and short-lived and usually go away on their own without treatment.

Common side effects include:

For the nasal spray vaccine

- runny or blocked nose
- sore throat
- wheezing
- headache.

For the needle vaccine

- swelling, redness or pain where the needle was given

Other possible side effects for both vaccines include:

- vomiting
- muscle aches
- fever
- cough
- tiredness.

These side effects usually start soon after vaccination and settle within a few days.

For non-urgent advice on managing common side effects, call 1800MEDICARE on 1800 633 422. This is a free 24/7 service that connects you with registered nurses who can provide fast, reliable health advice.

Serious side effects

Serious side effects from influenza vaccinations are very rare. If they do happen, severe allergic reactions, such as hives, swelling or anaphylaxis usually appear within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccine is given.

If your child has a reaction that concerns you:

- talk to your immunisation provider if you are still in the clinic
- call triple zero (000) or go to your closest emergency department if the reaction seems severe.

Reporting side effects

Report any significant reactions after immunisation to WAVSS by:

- online: WAVSS
- call 08 6456 0208 (9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday)
- in person: speak with your immunisation provider.

Learn more

- Ask your healthcare provider
- Visit Immunisation Foundation of Australia
- Access your child's immunisation record through the Australian Immunisation Register at myGov
- Visit HealthyWA Influenza vaccine
- FluMist Consumer product information
- Questions about vaccination

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