

Influenza (the flu)

2024 free flu vaccinations

The [flu vaccine is free](#) for all Queenslanders aged 6 months and older.

Overview

Influenza (or the flu) is a highly contagious, acute viral infection that spreads easily from person to person. Influenza is most often caused by type A or B influenza viruses that infect the upper airways and lungs.

The timing and duration of the flu season in Queensland varies from year to year but generally occurs between May and September, with a peak commonly in August. In tropical areas, the pattern can be more variable and may include clusters outside this period.

Flu is not the same as a common cold or COVID-19, but it can be a serious illness. For some people, such as young children, the elderly, and those with underlying medical conditions, the flu can cause serious complications requiring hospitalisation and can sometimes lead to death.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms usually appear 1 to 3 days after becoming infected. People are potentially infectious to others even before they have symptoms.

The symptoms of flu can include:

- fever
- sore throat
- dry cough
- headache
- muscle and joint pain
- tiredness or extreme exhaustion

In the elderly, fever may be absent and the only signs and symptoms of flu may be:

- confusion
- shortness of breath
- worsening of a chronic condition

Groups at risk of severe disease

The following groups are considered at high risk for developing severe disease from influenza:

- the very young – infants and children aged 0-4 years, but especially those younger than 2
- the elderly – adults aged 65 years and older
- those who are immunocompromised
- those with chronic disease (e.g. asthma, diabetes, heart disease)
- pregnant people
- First Nations people

Treatment

Generally, flu is managed by:

- resting at home
- drinking plenty of fluids (particularly water)
- taking over-the-counter medication to help relieve symptoms (take as directed in the product information).

Prescription antiviral medications can reduce the length of time symptoms last and help you return to your daily routines earlier. These medications are most effective if they are started within 48 hours of flu symptoms appearing. Indications for consideration of prescribing antiviral medications include:

- Severe disease
- Risk of severe disease
- Immunocompromise
- Institutional outbreaks

See your doctor or call [13 HEALTH \(13 43 25 84\)](tel:13432584) if you:

- are concerned about your symptoms
- are in a high-risk group and have a cough and or high fever (38 degrees Celsius or more) that is not improving

Transmission

Flu can spread from person to person by:

- droplets spreading from an infected person when they cough, sneeze or talk
- touching surfaces contaminated by infected droplets (including hands, remote controls, phones, keyboards and door handles) and then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes.

People with flu can be infectious to others from 24 hours before symptoms start until a week after the start of symptoms. Children and those who have compromised immune systems can be infectious for longer. Even people with mild flu illness can transmit the infection.

Prevention

You can reduce the risk of infection by getting vaccinated and practising good hand and respiratory hygiene to protect yourself and others. If you are experiencing flu symptoms, you should:

- stay home when you are sick (in general, you can be infectious for up to a week after the onset of symptoms)
- wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub
- wash your hands before touching your eyes, nose, and mouth
- if you need to go out when you are unwell, wear a mask and practice social distancing
- use a tissue, or the inside of your arm, when you cough and sneeze
- throw tissues away immediately and wash your hands
- don't share items such as cups, lipstick, toys, cigarettes, vapes or anything which has come into contact with the mouth or nose
- stay at least 1 metre away from people who have flu-like symptoms
- clean frequently touched surfaces regularly, such as mobile phones, keyboards, remote controls, door handles, taps, tables, benches, gym equipment and fridge doors (flu viruses can be removed using household detergent)