



Australian Government

Department of Health

Chief Medical Officer

Early advice on 2022 National Immunisation Program Seasonal Influenza Vaccination

Key points for 2022

- 2022 influenza vaccines for the National Immunisation Program will be available from April, subject to local supply arrangements.
- Influenza vaccines can be co-administered (on the same day) with COVID-19 vaccines.
- It is even more important that people, especially those most vulnerable to complications from influenza, receive an influenza vaccine in 2022.

Dear Colleague

I am writing to provide important information about the upcoming 2022 influenza season.

Over the COVID-19 period, reduced circulation of influenza virus and lower levels of influenza vaccine coverage compared with previous years may have resulted in low levels of community immunity. With international borders reopening, a resurgence of influenza is expected in 2022 with the Australian community potentially more vulnerable to the virus this year.

It is even more important that people, especially those most vulnerable to complications from influenza, receive an influenza vaccine this year. Vaccination is recommended each season for all people aged 6 months and over.

The influenza vaccine is funded through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for people most at risk, including adults aged 65 years and over, children aged 6 months to less than 5 years, pregnant women, people with an increased risk of complications from influenza including those with certain underlying medical conditions and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over.

The best protection from both infections in 2022 is for the community to receive an influenza vaccine and be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. I ask that you consider opportunities where appropriate to increase uptake of influenza vaccines through co-administration with COVID-19 vaccines.

I am particularly concerned about increasing the uptake of influenza vaccines in children aged 6 months to less than 5 years who are eligible for a free vaccine under the program. Lower vaccine coverage and exposure to influenza last year in this cohort increases the risk of complications from influenza in children who have potentially never been exposed to influenza. Pregnant women are also more than twice as likely to be admitted to hospital as other people with influenza. Influenza vaccination remains low among pregnant women. To

improve uptake in these groups, the Government will be running dedicated communication campaigns this year.

2022 NIP influenza vaccines will be available from April. Annual influenza vaccination should occur from April onwards to provide protection for the peak of the influenza season, which is generally June to September, but may be atypical this year particularly in the context of COVID-19 and the return of international travel. Note though, vaccination can occur as soon as vaccine stock is available and if appropriate for a patient's individual circumstances.

ATAGI clinical advice

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has finalised its *Statement on the administration of seasonal influenza vaccines in 2022*, which is attached to this letter for your reference.

Discard 2021 influenza vaccines when they expire

All 2021 influenza vaccines have expiry dates ranging from 30 November 2021 to 29 February 2022. Ensure that 2021 vaccines are only used until their respective expiry dates (at the latest 29 February 2022) and then discard all expired stock in advance of receiving 2022 vaccines.

Further information

The Chief Medical Officer will write again in late March with further details and clinical resources to coincide with the start of the 2022 NIP influenza vaccination program. Additional information will also be made available through the Department of Health's immunisation website at health.gov.au/immunisation.

We continue to encourage vaccination providers and other interested stakeholders to get the latest NIP updates by [subscribing to our email list](#).

Please share this information with your networks and practices who administer or prescribe vaccines.

Thank you for your continuing support in delivering this important vaccination program.

Yours sincerely



Dr Sonya Bennett
Acting Chief Medical Officer
22 February 2022

Encl. ATAGI Statement on the administration of seasonal influenza vaccines in 2022