



Myth: The flu vaccine gives you the flu

Fact: You definitely cannot get the flu from the flu shot. The flu vaccine is a small dose of parts of the inactivated (killed) flu virus – it contains no live flu virus at all – so it cannot give you the flu. Some people who get the flu shot may experience redness and swelling around the area of the injection, which normally disappears within a few days. A small percentage of people may also suffer short-lived fever, tiredness and symptoms similar to the flu but this is not the flu.

Myth: The flu is not a serious illness

Fact: The flu is a highly contagious disease that can lead to severe complications, including hospitalisation, pneumonia and death. For young children and the elderly, the flu is one of the most common causes of hospitalisation for vaccine preventable diseases in South Australia. Pregnant women have an increased risk of complications because part of their immune system is naturally suppressed during pregnancy and their 'expanded size' can make breathing more difficult.

Myth: You don't need to be immunised if you've had the flu in the past

Fact: Vaccination each year is important as the strains of flu virus circulating in our community change. Some strains can cause more serious illness than others. No one is totally immune to the different strains of the flu virus. Most people can get sick with the flu multiple times over the course of their life. The flu spreads easily from person to person through breathing, coughing and sneezing. The virus can also be spread when people touch other people and objects (for example a door handle or toy) which have tiny droplets of saliva from others coughing or sneezing.

Myth: The flu vaccine causes severe reactions or side effects

Fact: The flu vaccine is very safe. Most people experience no symptoms after their vaccination. However, some people may experience some redness or soreness at the area where the needle was given. Mild flu-like symptoms may occur in some people and usually last no more than a day or two. These symptoms can include:

- mild fever
- headache
- aching muscles.

Due to a smaller body and surface area, children (especially if under five) may develop higher body temperatures than adults after having the flu shot. This can sometimes result in convulsions caused by the fever. Rarely, flu vaccination can result in an immediate allergic reaction, which can very rarely be severe.

Immunisation providers are trained to ask about potential allergic reactions before giving the vaccine and to treat such reactions if they occur following the vaccination. People who have had a severe allergic reaction to the influenza vaccine in the past should not be vaccinated again.

Myth: Getting a flu shot every year weakens your immune system

Fact: The vaccine prepares and boosts your immune system to help fight the virus if you are exposed to it. People who get the flu shot every year are better protected against flu than those who do not get vaccinated.

Myth: The vaccine doesn't work because I got vaccinated last year and still got the flu

Fact: There are many different strains of flu and one vaccine cannot protect against them all. The vaccine contains the most common strains of flu expected to occur in Australia each year. As these strains may change each year, a person needs to get vaccinated every year to be protected against new strains. The vaccine takes up to two weeks to work. It is important to remember that the vaccine does not contain any 'live' strains of the viruses and can not give you the flu. For those who get the flu, despite being vaccinated, their illness is usually much less severe. There are also many other illnesses that can cause flu-like illnesses. The flu vaccine does not protect against these illnesses. It may also be possible that you caught the flu virus before, or just after, you were vaccinated.

Myth: It is not necessary to get immunised against the flu every year because previous vaccinations will protect me

Fact: It is important to get re-vaccinated against flu every year as the flu strains can change. New vaccines are made each year based on the strains most likely to be present during the coming flu season. Even if the main flu strains do not change, yearly vaccination is still recommended as immunity from flu vaccination is not long lasting. Quadrivalent influenza vaccines (QIV) are available in Australia made by different pharmaceutical companies. QIV contain antigens of four virus strains (two influenza A strains and two influenza B strain). For people aged 65 years and over, specially formulated trivalent vaccines (TIV) are available containing three strains (two A and one B). These vaccines offer better protection for the elderly against influenza infection.