



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health**

**Chief Medical Officer**

## **Early advice on 2020 National Immunisation Program Seasonal Influenza Vaccination**

Dear Colleague

I am writing to provide information about the upcoming influenza season and vaccines available under the National Immunisation Program (NIP).

Influenza seasons and their severity are unpredictable. However, what we do know is that vaccination is the most important measure we have to prevent influenza and its complications and is recommended for all people aged 6 months and over.

To meet the anticipated demand for seasonal influenza vaccines in 2020, the Australian Government will be securing the largest supply of seasonal influenza vaccines for the NIP ever for people most at risk. NIP influenza vaccines will be available from mid-April 2020, subject to local vaccine supply.

### **Vaccination timing**

The timing of vaccination should aim to achieve the highest level of protection during the peak of the influenza season. This usually occurs from June to September in most parts of Australia. Vaccinating from mid-April provides protection before the peak season takes place. While protection is generally expected to last for the whole season, the best protection against influenza occurs within the first 3 to 4 months following vaccination.

Revaccination later in the same year is not routinely recommended, but may benefit some individuals due to personal circumstances, such as travel or pregnancy. Only one dose of government-funded influenza vaccine is available for eligible people each year, with the exception of children up to 9 years of age who are receiving the influenza vaccine for the first time. These children require, and are funded for, 2 doses.

Vaccination should continue to be offered as long as influenza viruses are circulating and a valid vaccine (before expiration date) is available. This is particularly important for people who become eligible for free vaccination throughout the season such as pregnant women (who should receive the vaccine at any stage during pregnancy) and young children from 6 months of age.

### **What's new for 2020?**

- All people aged 6 months to less than 5 years will be eligible for free influenza vaccines under the NIP in 2020. Please review the processes in your clinic to ensure all children in this age group are offered free vaccines.
- This year Australia is the first country to offer an adjuvanted Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (QIV), Flud<sup>®</sup> Quad, for people aged 65 years and over.
- New age-specific vaccines will be available under the NIP in 2020 for eligible people, and age indications for some vaccines have changed (refer to ATAGI clinical advice for details).

### **ATAGI clinical advice**

- The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has finalised its *Statement on the administration of seasonal influenza vaccines in 2020*, which is attached to this letter for your reference.
- Refer to the ATAGI Statement for up-to-date clinical advice and information on the age-specific QIVs available under the NIP in 2020, influenza strains included in this year's vaccines, and timing of vaccination, among other relevant topics.

### **Discard 2019 influenza vaccines when they expire**

- Note that all 2019 influenza vaccines have expiry dates ranging from 30 November 2019 to 29 February 2020.
- Ensure that 2019 vaccines are only used until their respective expiry dates (at the latest 29 February 2020) and then discard all expired stock in advance of receiving 2020 vaccines.

### **Further information**

I will write again in April with further details and clinical resources to coincide with the start of the 2020 NIP influenza vaccination program. Additional information will also be made available through the Department of Health's immunisation website at [health.gov.au/immunisation](http://health.gov.au/immunisation).

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

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

Yours sincerely



Professor Brendan Murphy  
Chief Medical Officer  
2 March 2020

**Encl. ATAGI Statement on the administration of seasonal influenza vaccines in 2020**



## STATEMENT ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF SEASONAL INFLUENZA VACCINES IN 2020

*It is important to read this statement in conjunction with The Australian Immunisation Handbook available at [immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au](http://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au).*

### Overview of key points and updates for 2020

- Annual vaccination is the most important measure to prevent influenza and its complications.
- Annual influenza vaccination is recommended for all people  $\geq 6$  months of age.
- All vaccines available in 2020 are quadrivalent influenza vaccines (QIVs).
- All children aged 6 months to less than 5 years are now eligible to receive free annual influenza vaccines under the National Immunisation Program (NIP).
- The dose of influenza vaccines for all ages is 0.5mL. The 0.25mL dose for young children is no longer available.
- For adults aged  $\geq 65$  years the adjuvanted QIV, Flud<sup>®</sup> Quad, is preferentially recommended over standard QIVs.

**Table 1. Seasonal influenza vaccines registered and available for use in Australia in 2020, by age**

Vaccine Registered age group	FluQuadri 0.50 mL (Sanofi)	Vaxigrip Tetra 0.50 mL (Sanofi)	Fluarix Tetra 0.50 mL (GSK)	Afluria Quad 0.50 mL (Seqirus)	Influvac Tetra 0.50 mL (Mylan)	Flud Quad 0.50 mL (Seqirus)
6 to 35 months ( $< 3$ years)	✓	✓	✓*	x	x	x
$\geq 3$ to $< 5$ years	✓	✓	✓*	x	✓	x
$\geq 5$ to $< 65$ years	✓*	✓*	✓*	✓*	✓	x
$\geq 65$ years	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓†

Ticks indicate age at which a vaccine is registered and available. Shaded boxes represent funding under the NIP.

\* Funding only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, pregnant women and people who have certain medical conditions.

† Adjuvanted QIV preferred over standard QIVs.

### Influenza virus strains included in the 2020 southern hemisphere seasonal influenza vaccines:

- A (H1N1): [an A/Brisbane/02/2018 \(H1N1\)pdm09-like virus](#);
- A (H3N2): [an A/South Australia/34/2019 \(H3N2\)-like virus](#);
- B: [a B/Washington/02/2019-like \(B/Victoria lineage\) virus](#);
- B: [a B/Phuket/3073/2013-like \(B/Yamagata lineage\) virus](#).

### Highlights for 2020 influenza vaccine formulations

- Vaxigrip Tetra<sup>®</sup> is a QIV, newly registered for use in adults and children from 6 months of age.
- Flud<sup>®</sup> Quad is an adjuvanted QIV, newly registered for use in adults  $\geq 65$  years of age.
- FluQuadri<sup>®</sup> is a QIV, previously registered for adults and children from 3 years of age. The age indication for this vaccine has now been extended to include children from 6 months of age. The FluQuadri Junior formulation is no longer available.

- Influvac Tetra® is a QIV, previously registered for adults from 18 years of age. The age indication for this vaccine has now been extended to include children from 3 years of age.

#### Timing of vaccination

- Annual vaccination should occur before the onset of each influenza season. The period of peak influenza circulation is typically June to September in most parts of Australia.
- While protection is generally expected to last for the whole season, optimal protection against influenza occurs within the first 3 to 4 months following vaccination.
- Vaccination should continue to be offered as long as influenza viruses are circulating and a valid vaccine (before expiration date) is available. Some vaccine brands now have an expiry date of February 2021.
- Revaccination later in the same year is not routinely recommended, but may benefit some individuals due to personal circumstances, such as travel or pregnancy.

#### Influenza vaccination for pregnant women

- Influenza vaccine is recommended in every pregnancy and at any stage of pregnancy.
- Influenza vaccine can safely be given at the same time as pertussis vaccine.
- For women who received an influenza vaccine in 2019, revaccinate if the 2020 influenza vaccine becomes available before the end of pregnancy.
- For women who receive an influenza vaccine before becoming pregnant, revaccinate during pregnancy to protect the unborn infant.

#### Eligibility for influenza vaccines funded by the National Immunisation Program (NIP)

- Annual influenza vaccination is recommended and NIP-funded for all children 6 months to <5 years and all adults ≥65 years. It is also recommended for all people 5 to <65 years of age, but only NIP-funded in specific populations in this age group due to their increased risk of complications from influenza. These populations include:
  - *All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;*
  - *People who have certain medical conditions which increase the risk of influenza disease complications (refer to Table 2);*
  - *Pregnant women (during any stage of pregnancy).*

**Table 2. Medical conditions associated with an increased risk of influenza disease complications and for which individuals are eligible for free vaccination under the NIP\***

Category	Vaccination strongly recommended for individuals with the following conditions
<b>Cardiac disease</b>	Cyanotic congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure, coronary artery disease
<b>Chronic respiratory conditions</b>	Severe asthma, cystic fibrosis, bronchiectasis, suppurative lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, chronic emphysema
<b>Chronic neurological conditions</b>	Hereditary and degenerative CNS diseases, seizure disorders, spinal cord injuries, neuromuscular disorders
<b>Immunocompromising conditions</b>	Immunocompromised due to disease or treatment, asplenia or splenic dysfunction, HIV infection
<b>Diabetes and other metabolic disorders</b>	Type 1 or 2 diabetes, chronic metabolic disorders
<b>Renal disease</b>	Chronic renal failure
<b>Haematological disorders</b>	Haemoglobinopathies
<b>Long-term aspirin therapy in children aged 6 months to 10 years</b>	These children are at increased risk of Reye syndrome following influenza infection

\* Please refer to The Australian Immunisation Handbook available at [immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au](http://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au) for advice on persons who are strongly recommended to receive annual influenza vaccination but not eligible for NIP-funded influenza vaccines.