

## 10 myths about influenza

### What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly known as 'the flu', is an illness caused when an influenza virus infects the respiratory tract – your nose and lungs.

Influenza infection usually has different symptoms and causes a more severe illness than the 'common cold' which is a viral infection caused by rhinovirus. Influenza may be a life-threatening infection in some people.



### Flu is a common trigger for asthma along with other respiratory viruses

Australian flu outbreaks are usually seasonal, occurring from late autumn through winter and into early spring.

Influenza vaccination (the flu shot) offers a high degree of protection against the flu and its severe consequences.

There are several different influenza viruses and strains. The type usually changes from year to year, so the recommended vaccine also changes from year to year.

See your doctor for a flu shot each autumn. The vaccine is free for people with diagnosed asthma and anyone over 65.



### Dispelling the myths

#### MYTH 1: Influenza is not serious.

Influenza (the flu) is highly contagious and for some people it is a potentially life-threatening disease.

#### MYTH 2: It's just a cold.

While cold and flu symptoms might seem similar at first, the flu can become serious. Typical flu symptoms can include:

- fever or chills
- sore throat and/or severe cough
- headaches, muscle aches and pains.

Children's symptoms may also include nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.

#### MYTH 3: Vaccination can cause the flu.

Influenza vaccines used in Australia do not contain any live viruses, so you cannot get the flu from a flu shot.

#### MYTH 4: The vaccine is not effective.

While the vaccine may not be 100% effective in all people, it remains the single most effective way to prevent influenza.

#### MYTH 5: Vaccination will make me ill.

Serious reactions to the flu shot are rare. The most common side-effects are skin redness and swelling where you had the injection.



## MYTH 6: I'm young and healthy so I won't get the flu.

Anyone can contract the flu. Being fit and healthy doesn't stop infection. The flu is highly contagious, so protecting yourself can also help protect those close to you.

## MYTH 7: I was vaccinated last year, I'll be right for a while.

The types of viruses circulating in the community usually change from year to year. You need an annual flu shot to give you immunity against current strains of influenza viruses.

## MYTH 8: Sick people shouldn't be vaccinated against the flu.

If you have a minor illness without fever, vaccination is fine, especially if you are in one of the groups at risk of serious complications. These include people with heart conditions, asthma and other chronic respiratory conditions, chronic kidney disease, diabetes, neuromuscular disorders and impaired immunity.

## MYTH 9: Flu vaccination is dangerous for pregnant women and unborn children.

There is growing evidence that vaccination during pregnancy protects the mother from serious illness and then the infant during the first months of life. There is no evidence that vaccination is unsafe for mother or baby.

## MYTH 10: I had the vaccination last year but still got the flu.

Did you have the flu or a cold? The vaccine doesn't protect against colds.

- Most adults have 2 to 4 colds a year.
- Parents of young children may have more.
- Children have around 6 to 10 colds per year.

## Feeling unwell?

Look out for asthma symptoms and follow your written asthma action plan. It is important to have an up to date asthma action plan because viral infections are a common trigger of asthma attacks.

If you feel unwell:

- get lots of rest and stay hydrated.
- stay home — try to avoid infecting others.
- seek medical help straight away if your symptoms are severe or rapidly getting worse.

## More information

- **National Asthma Council Australia**  
'How-to videos': [nationalasthma.org.au/health-professionals/how-to-videos](https://nationalasthma.org.au/health-professionals/how-to-videos)
- **Department of Health:** [health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/seasonal-influenza-vaccine](https://health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/seasonal-influenza-vaccine)
- **Lung Foundation Australia:** [lungfoundation.com.au/lung-health/pneumonia-cold-flu/](https://lungfoundation.com.au/lung-health/pneumonia-cold-flu/)

## Download asthma action plans



## First aid for asthma charts



**Disclaimer:** It is important to note that information contained in this fact sheet is not intended to replace professional medical advice. Any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment should be directed to a medical practitioner.