Protecting your family from COVID-19 and flu this winter

Thousands of people across Victoria are still getting COVID-19 each day and now influenza (flu) cases are on the rise too. The best way to protect yourself and your children against COVID-19 and the flu this winter is to get vaccinated against these viruses.

COVID-19 vaccination for children aged 5-11

Children aged 5-11 are given a smaller dose of Pfizer vaccine created especially for their age group (a third of the dose given to people aged 12 and older). For the vaccine to be most effective, children should get two doses, eight weeks apart.

Flu vaccination for people aged 6 months and older

Flu is caused by a highly contagious virus that is spread by contact with fluids from coughs and sneezes. This year, hospitals and GP clinics are seeing large numbers of people with the flu so the Victorian Government has made the flu vaccine free to all Victorians throughout June 2022. Flu vaccinations are available for free through GPs and pharmacies. Medicare cards are not required. Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommends the annual flu vaccine for everyone aged 6 months and older.

If children will only experience mild symptoms, why should they get vaccinated?

Most children experience mild symptoms when they get the flu or COVID-19; however, some children will get very unwell. Particularly, children with conditions such as down syndrome, cerebral palsy or obesity. Vaccination also reduces the risk of children developing 'long COVID' or multisystem inflammatory syndrome (known as MIS-C or PIMS-TS), a severe disease that can affect organs and systems in the body. Both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines reduce the risk of severe illness and the likelihood of transmitting the virus to others.

Free COVID-19 and flu vaccinations will be available at Deer Park West Primary School on Wednesday 15 June from 3.30–6pm. Everyone over 5 years of age is welcome. No bookings are required. Vaccines will be administered by Taylors Hill Medical Centre.

What are the most common side effects from COVID-19 and flu vaccines?

The most common side effects for both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines include pain at the injection site, fever or muscle aches, generally lasting no more than two days.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe for children?

Yes. All COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in Australia are safe and effective across all age groups. Scientists and medical experts assess vaccine research, findings from clinical trials and real-world evidence to help them decide whether a vaccine is safe for use and effective against infection. The World Health Organization, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the ATAGI all recommend COVID-19 vaccination for children and teenagers aged 5 years and older.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine effective for children?

Yes. The paediatric Pfizer dose has been demonstrated to be effective in protecting children aged 5-11 against COVID-19. A clinical trial* with 2186 participants found that two doses of the paediatric vaccine was 90.7 effective at preventing symptomatic infection from COVID-19 for children aged 5-11.
(*Walter EB, Talaat KR, Sabharwal C, et al. Evaluation of the BNT162b2¬ COVID-19 Vaccine in Children 5 to 11 Years of Age. N Eng J Med 2022;386:35-36)

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Preventing COVID-19 and flu this winter

Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and your family from COVID-19 and flu. You can also prevent colds, flu and COVID-19 by:

- regularly washing or sanitising your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitiser
- coughing or sneezing into a tissue, or your elbow (be sure to throw out the tissue and wash your hands immediately afterwards)
- wearing a mask when you can't socially distance, or if visiting a high-risk setting like a hospital. Although masks are no longer required in most places, they are very effective in slowing the spread of many different viruses including flu and COVID-19.

What should I do if I'm unwell?

If you have a cough, runny nose, or fever, you should get a COVID-19 test as soon as possible to ensure you can isolate from others and receive treatment before symptoms get worse. If you have symptoms but return a negative rapid antigen test, you should also get a PCR test as they more accurately detect low levels of COVID-19 virus, especially early in your illness.

If you have the flu, a bad cold or other virus, you should stay at home and keep away from other people until you are no longer sick. This includes not going to work, school or childcare when you are unwell as you could make other people sick too.

Most people can safely recover from flu and COVID-19 at home. See your doctor if you have any concerns about your symptoms. Seek immediate medical attention if you experience any of the following symptoms: difficulty breathing, chest pain, sudden dizziness, confusion, severe vomiting, or fever with a rash. If you have severe trouble breathing, blueness around the mouth, chest pains, or pain in your arms or jaw, call triple zero (000) for urgent help.

Who should I see about a cough, cold, COVID-19 or flu symptoms?

Many GPs are providing telehealth appointments for patients who have symptoms like a cough, runny nose, sore throat or fever. If you'd like a face-to-face appointment with a doctor, you can make an appointment at a GP respiratory clinic. Nearby GP respiratory clinics include:

- Derrimut Respiratory Clinic (Derrimut Medical), Shop 14, 20 Mt Derrimut Rd, Derrimut
- Sunbury Respiratory Clinic (Goonawarra Medical), 1-5 Dornoch Drive, Sunbury
- Sunshine Respiratory Clinic (Sunshine City Medical Centre), 423 Ballarat Road, Sunshine.

Please call 000 if you require urgent medical attention, particularly if you have or might have COVID-19 and your condition has deteriorated.

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