

PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS



What you need to know about seasonal flu (influenza)

What is flu?

The 'real' flu (Influenza) is an infectious disease of the respiratory tracts. It is caused by flu viruses (Influenza viruses) that mostly circulate during the cold months from December to March. Flu typically occurs as an epidemic – in other words in spatial and temporal clusters – during the winter months. Unlike many milder viral cold infections, flu can be life-threatening.

How does flu manifest itself?

Flu is often mistaken for a cold. It may also be confused with COVID-19.

Typically in flu:

- Symptoms often appear suddenly and abruptly with a feeling of being very unwell and chills
- High temperature over 38 °C
- Cough (initially dry)
- Headache
- Muscle and joint pain
- Fatigue, dizziness
- Occasionally sniffles, sore throat and pain when swallowing

It is also possible to have a mild form of flu with just a few symptoms.

How flu compares to colds and COVID-19

The symptoms of many colds differ from those of flu (influenza). The typical symptoms of a cold include sniffles, a sore throat and pain when swallowing, red eyes and, in the case of children, a fever.

COVID-19 can also cause symptoms similar to those of flu. Both can in some cases cause severe and sometimes life-threatening complications, while this is very rare in colds.

How do I protect myself from flu?

Vaccination can help prevent you from getting the flu in winter. The flu vaccination only provides protection from 'real' flu (influenza), but not from COVID-19 or the colds that people get in winter. The COVID-19 vaccination doesn't protect you from the flu.

You can have a flu vaccination at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccination or before or after a COVID-19 vaccination. Get advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

The general recommendations on hygiene and behaviour help to reduce the risk of an infection with the influenza and other viruses.

What should I do if I suspect I have flu?

If you experience cold or flu symptoms, stay at home, or leave your workplace, school etc. as soon as possible and go home. This will prevent further transmission of the disease.

Avoid contact with others where possible, especially people with an increased risk of flu complications, drink plenty of fluids, and rest.

Medicines for pain and fever may relieve your symptoms; get advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

People aged over 65, pregnant women and people who suffer from a chronic illness should closely monitor their flu symptoms and call a doctor without delay if there are any problems.

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These recommendations will also protect you from other viruses.

Hygiene and behavioural recommendations



Get a flu vaccination.

The simplest and most effective way of protecting yourself against flu is to get the annual flu vaccination in the autumn. It is particularly recommended if you have an increased risk of flu complications, or if you have direct contact in a work or social capacity with people who have an increased risk of complications.



Ventilate several times a day.

Ventilating indoor spaces helps remove air that contains virus particles and reduces the risk of transmission. We therefore recommend that rooms and areas where people from different households congregate should be well ventilated on a regular basis. Temperature permitting, it is a good idea to leave windows open for extended periods. Further information can be found on the website "Protect yourself and others".



Stay at home if you have symptoms.

If you experience flu symptoms (e.g. chills, a high temperature, feeling unwell, sore throat, cough, muscle and joint pain), stay at home, or leave your workplace, school, etc. and go home as quickly as possible.



Keep your distance and wear a mask.

Keeping your distance and wearing a mask help to reduce the risk of transmitting flu viruses and other pathogens (e.g. the coronavirus). If you have contact with people at especially high risk, it is a good idea to wear a mask.



Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the crook of your arm.

When you cough or sneeze, hold a paper tissue in front of your mouth and nose. Dispose of paper tissues in the bin after use. Wash your hands afterwards with water and soap. If you don't have a paper tissue to hand, cough or sneeze into the crook of your arm.



Wash or disinfect your hands thoroughly.

Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly with water and soap. Or disinfect them. For example, when you get home, after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing, and before you eat or prepare food.

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Fact sheet for people with a chronic illness and people aged 65 and over

Prevent flu and its complications – get a flu vaccination

Do you suffer from a chronic illness? And/or are you aged 65 or over?

If so, we recommend you get vaccinated against seasonal flu as you have an increased risk of flu complications. For your protection we also recommend people close to you get vaccinated, in other words your family members and close contacts.

Flu is not always harmless. It can sometimes lead to severe complications. These may be caused by the flu virus itself or by a bacterial infection.

Common complications associated with flu are: upper respiratory tract infections, middle ear infection and pneumonia.

Other complications are less common: pleurisy (inflammation of the lining of the lungs), inflammation of the heart muscle and diseases of the nervous system including encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). Flu can also increase the likelihood of a heart attack or a stroke.

If you experience severe complications, you will have to go to hospital. Recovery may take some time. Flu can also be life-threatening.

In people with chronic illnesses, flu may in some circumstances aggravate the symptoms of the underlying disease.

Vaccination offers the best protection against flu. It must be repeated every year as flu viruses are constantly mutating and the vaccine therefore has to be adapted from one year to the next.

In which chronic illnesses is flu vaccination recommended?

Besides people aged 65 or over, flu vaccination is particularly recommended for children, adolescents and adults with the following chronic illnesses:

- chronic respiratory diseases (including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD])
- cardiovascular diseases
- liver or kidney diseases
- metabolic disorders, e.g. diabetes
- chronic neurological disorders, e.g. Parkinson's disease
- congenital or acquired immunodeficiencies
- HIV

What about people with cancer?

Flu can be particularly dangerous for cancer sufferers. In many cases, vaccination prevents people catching flu, or causes them to experience a milder form of the virus. If you are unsure whether vaccination is right for you, or whether it may not be advisable on health grounds, please talk to your doctor.

Who covers the costs?

The costs of the vaccination are covered by the compulsory health insurance provided your deductible has already been used up.

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Fact sheet for family members and close contacts of people with an increased risk of flu complications

Vaccination also protects those around you

When is a flu vaccination recommended?

If you have a family member or close contact with an increased risk of flu complications, getting a flu vaccination means you are also indirectly protecting them.

The flu vaccination is recommended for anyone who has direct contact – either in a work or social capacity – with someone who has an increased risk of flu complications.

The following people have an increased risk of flu complications:

- People aged 65 or over
- Pregnant women or women who have given birth within the last 4 weeks
- Premature babies (in the first two winters after birth)
- Infants aged under 6 months
- People with one of the following illnesses:
 - chronic respiratory disorders (including asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD])
 - cardiovascular diseases
 - liver or kidney diseases
 - metabolic disorders, e.g. diabetes
 - chronic neurological disorders, e.g. Parkinson's disease
 - congenital or acquired immunodeficiencies
 - HIV
 - cancer
- patients in care homes and facilities for people with chronic illnesses

Who are 'family members and close contacts'?

'Family members and close contacts' means anyone who lives or works with someone with an increased risk of flu complications, or has regular contact with them.

This includes all health care workers, people working in the paramedical sector, and people who work in nurseries, day care centres, retirement homes/care homes, facilities for people with disabilities, and personal assistants. This also includes children aged over 6 months and adolescents if they have regular contact with people with an increased risk of flu complications (e.g. parents, siblings or grandparents).

People you encounter in day-to-day life (e.g. on public transport, when shopping) are not considered close contacts. However, anyone who would like to reduce their risk of catching flu for private and/or professional reasons can consider being vaccinated.

A strong gesture of solidarity

People with an increased risk of complications only have limited protection from flu, e.g. because their immune systems do not respond well to the vaccine. If you get vaccinated, you will not only be protecting yourself, but also your family members and people around you.

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Fact sheet for pregnant women

Everything you need to know about flu protection during pregnancy

How dangerous is flu during pregnancy?

Pregnant women are more likely than non-pregnant women to catch flu and are more likely to suffer complications, such as pneumonia. This is particularly true in the second half of pregnancy. Flu leads to increased pregnancy and birth complications, premature birth and growth delays in the child. Infants also have a significantly increased risk of suffering from severe flu during the first six months.

How and when should I get protected?

The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) recommends the flu vaccination to all pregnant women and to all women who have given birth in the last four weeks. The flu vaccination season lasts from mid-October until the beginning of the flu epidemic. In Switzerland, the flu epidemic usually starts in January.

Why should I get vaccinated? Will this also protect my child?

Vaccination prevents flu and its complications, which are more likely to occur during pregnancy. When a pregnant woman gets a flu vaccination, she is not only increasing her own protection: maternal antibodies can also protect the newborn against flu for several weeks after birth. Infants born to mothers who had a flu vaccination during pregnancy are less likely to catch flu and are less likely to be hospitalised due to flu in the first few months of their lives. This is especially important as infants cannot be vaccinated before six months of age and are thus at risk of catching flu.

How safe is the vaccination during pregnancy?

Flu vaccination is safe throughout pregnancy and has no negative effects on your unborn child. The vaccines recommended for pregnant women are inactivated, which means they do not contain any live flu viruses, only the surface proteins. They do not have any known negative effects on pregnancy outcomes, foetal development, birth outcomes or breastfeeding. Both the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Swiss Society of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (SGGG) recommend the flu vaccination for all women during pregnancy.

What are the possible side effects?

After you have had a flu vaccination, you may experience soreness or redness at the injection site. Less common side effects are a high temperature, muscle pain and feeling slightly ill. These are generally harmless and subside after a few days. In very rare cases, people may experience a rash, oedema, or in the case of an allergy, breathing difficulties or an immediate allergic reaction (anaphylactic shock).

However, one thing is certain: the risk of developing severe flu complications is many times higher than the likelihood of experiencing severe side effects following the vaccination. Pregnant women are no more likely than the general population to experience the possible side effects of the flu vaccination mentioned above.

Who covers the costs?

The costs of the vaccination are covered by the compulsory health insurance provided your deductible has already been used up.

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Information about the flu vaccination

Why and for whom is the flu vaccination recommended?

The flu vaccination is the easiest and most effective way of protecting yourself and those around you from flu and its complications, which are occasionally severe. It is recommended for anyone with an increased risk of flu complications and their close work or social contacts.

You can find more information and the flu vaccination check at www.protectionagainstflu.ch.

Where and when can I get vaccinated?

You can get a flu vaccination from your doctor and at vaccination centres. In almost all cantons, healthy people aged 16 or over can also get a flu vaccination at a pharmacy (see www.impfapotheke.ch).

The flu vaccination season lasts from mid-October until the beginning of the flu epidemic. In Switzerland, the flu epidemic usually starts in January. Even if you get a flu vaccination in December, there is still time for your body's immune system to build up protection.

The flu vaccination must be repeated every year as flu viruses are constantly mutating and the vaccine therefore has to be adapted from one year to the next. A flu vaccination can be given at the same time as, before or after a COVID-19 vaccination.

How effective is the vaccination?

The flu vaccination is very safe and is usually well tolerated. The effectiveness of the flu vaccination varies widely depending on the influenza season and population group, ranging from 20% to 80%. The flu vaccination only provides protection against 'real' flu (influenza), but not against COVID-19 and all the coughs and colds that circulate in the winter months. The COVID-19 vaccination does not offer protection against flu.

What are the potential side effects?

After you have had a flu vaccination, you may experience soreness or redness at the injection site. You may also experience isolated symptoms, such as a high temperature, muscle pain or feeling slightly unwell. These are generally harmless and subside after a few days. In very rare cases, people may experience a rash, oedema, or in the case of an allergy, breathing difficulties or an immediate allergic reaction (anaphylactic shock). If you need advice, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

However, one thing is certain: the risk of developing severe flu complications is many times higher than the likelihood of experiencing severe side effects following vaccination.

When should caution be taken regarding vaccination?

Sick people or those with a fever should wait until their symptoms subside before getting vaccinated as otherwise their immune systems will not respond well to the vaccine. The flu vaccination is only contraindicated for people with severe allergies (anaphylaxis) to vaccine ingredients.

Who covers the costs?

The costs of the vaccination are covered by the compulsory health insurance for people with an increased risk of complications (including pregnant women), provided their deductible has already been used up.

For vaccination in a pharmacy, the costs of the vaccine are reimbursed if the vaccination is medically prescribed; the costs of administering the vaccination are always borne by the vaccinated person. Many businesses, in particular in the medical or paramedical sector, offer their staff a free vaccination.

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Six good reasons to get vaccinated

We recommend the flu vaccination to anyone with an increased risk of flu complications, and all those who have direct contact on a regular basis – either in a work or social capacity – with people at especially high risk.

1 To protect yourself against flu

If you get vaccinated early enough in the autumn, you can reduce your risk of catching flu in the winter. Flu (influenza) can sometimes be severe and cause complications, such as pneumonia, pleurisy, myocarditis, encephalitis and Guillain-Barré syndrome. Flu can also increase the likelihood of a heart attack or a stroke.

2 To prevent transmission of flu viruses to those around you

Your flu vaccination will benefit your family members and friends, in particular people with an increased risk of complications (e.g. newborns, pregnant women and older people or those with underlying health conditions). Good hygiene measures and mask-wearing help reduce the risk of transmitting the virus and getting sick. But they do not replace the flu vaccination as you are already contagious without realising it two days before you develop symptoms.

3 To protect people at especially high risk from complications

Flu and its complications can be serious for people at especially high risk. Some people with an increased risk of complications cannot be vaccinated (e.g. infants under six months of age) or are only partially protected by vaccination (e.g. people with a weakened immune system). Your flu vaccination will help reduce the risk of people at especially high risk catching flu. Anyone who has close contact with people who have an increased risk of complications – whether in a work or social capacity – is advised to get a flu jab.

4 To opt for the most effective way of preventing flu

Eating a balanced diet, taking regular exercise, getting enough sleep, ensuring good hygiene, and staying away from the workplace when sick will reduce your risk of catching and transmitting various bugs and viruses. But often, this alone does not offer adequate protection.

The flu vaccination is the simplest and most effective way of preventing flu and is therefore a useful addition to the other hygiene and behavioural recommendations.

5 To remain an efficient team throughout the flu season

It is always difficult to predict exactly when the flu season will start and how bad it will be and it is also hard to tell how the coronavirus pandemic will evolve this winter. The aim is to look after your own health and reduce the effects of the flu season on those around you. This way, you can remain an efficient team throughout the pandemic – at work, at home or elsewhere. The more people in a team who are vaccinated, the better the team is protected.

6 To avoid a combination of flu and COVID-19

It is still important to keep the total number of COVID-19 and flu cases as low as possible to prevent our hospitals and healthcare workers from becoming overwhelmed. At a personal level, a vaccination will reduce the risk of falling ill with flu and COVID-19 at one and the same time.

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Facts about vaccines against seasonal flu

Efficacy

- Coverage of circulating viruses by the virus strains contained in influenza vaccines differs from year to year but is frequently above 90%. No clear statement can, however, be made about the efficacy of the flu vaccination each season. Taking the different factors into consideration, studies estimate the effectiveness against infection and mild illness to be between 20 and 80%. The protection against severe complications of influenza is significantly higher.
- The efficacy of the influenza vaccination is governed by various factors, including the age and immunocompetence of the person vaccinated and also the match between the influenza vaccine and the influenza viruses that are circulating.
- Efficacy is reduced in older people and those with chronic illnesses, especially if they have a weakened immune system. These people are thus particularly dependent on good protection through people in their environment being vaccinated.
- Even without optimum efficacy of the vaccine, however, there is much to suggest that the influenza vaccination can reduce the severity of the disease, the risk of complications and influenza-related mortality.

Inactivated influenza vaccines can be given at the same time as a COVID-19 vaccination or before or after a COVID-19 vaccination.

Possible undesirable effects

- Local reactions (pain, redness and itching at the injection site) are common. These are normally harmless and subside after one to two days.
- Systemic reactions (mild fever, muscle aches or a feeling of being ill) occur in some 5 to 10% of vaccinated individuals, also for one to two days after vaccination in most cases.
- Very rarely (in one case per million persons vaccinated) Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) occurs after an influenza vaccination. GBS is, however, caused much more frequently by infections with influenza viruses and other pathogens.
- Very rarely, urticaria, edema, allergic asthma or anaphylactic shock (especially in the case of hen's egg allergy).

Composition and ingredients

All flu vaccines are quadrivalent (tetraivalent). In other words, they contain components of four different influenza virus strains – two A strains and two B strains. Influenza viruses undergo constant genetic changes. The strains contained in the vaccines are aligned to the prevailing epidemiological situation every year in accordance with the WHO recommendations.

Inactivated influenza vaccines

- These influenza vaccines contain inactivated influenza viruses in the form of fragments or surface proteins.
- Inactivated influenza vaccines contain
 - no effect-enhancing additives (= adjuvants);
 - no aluminium;
 - no mercury (e.g. thiomersal = an organic compound containing mercury).
- The inactivated influenza vaccines also contain water, additives for their preservation and stabilisation and slight residual traces of hen's egg proteins or aminoglycoside antibiotics.

Attenuated live vaccine

- In addition to the inactivated influenza vaccines, Switzerland now offers an attenuated live vaccine for children and adolescents.
- This contains reproducible influenza viruses with greatly attenuated pathogenicity, as well as water and adjuvants for preservation and stabilisation.
 - It may also contain slight residual traces of hen's egg proteins.