

# Flu FAQ's 2023



## What is the flu?

The flu, (also called influenza) is a serious respiratory infection that is caused by influenza viruses which circulate in all parts of the world. It spreads very easily, and symptoms can include fever, chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, body aches, headaches and fatigue. The symptoms can range from mild to severe, and even death for high-risk groups.

## Is a cold the same as the flu?

They are both respiratory infections that spread easily, but are caused by different viruses. Common cold symptoms are usually milder than the flu. Most people have a runny nose, with no resulting serious health problems.

## Is it possible to have flu and COVID-19 at the same time?

Yes. It is possible to have flu, as well as other respiratory illnesses, and COVID-19 at the same time. Some of the symptoms of flu and COVID-19 are similar, making it hard to tell the difference between them based on symptoms alone. A RAT test can be useful to test for COVID-19.

## I am fit and Healthy, do I need a flu vaccination?

Anyone can catch the flu. Being fit and healthy does not protect you. Flu spreads very easily with up to 1 in 5 people catching the flu every year. By having a flu vaccination, you can protect yourself & reduce the chance of bringing it home to a baby, an older relative or someone with a medical condition who could become seriously ill if they catch the flu.

## Why do I need to get the flu vaccine every year?

Each year the World Health Organisation studies the different strains of flu that have been circulating in the winter season around the world that year. They then develop a flu vaccine to match those strains, as they are most likely to be circulating during our New Zealand winter season. Most years the strains of the flu viruses in the vaccine change. Even if they are the same for the following year, immunity can wane, so a flu vaccination each year is important.

## I am pregnant. Should I get the flu vaccine?

Yes. The World Health Organisation recommends annual flu vaccination at any stage in pregnancy. It is especially important for pregnant women to get a flu vaccination, because they are more likely to have serious complications, affecting themselves and their pregnancy if they catch the flu.

## Is it true that you can get the flu from the flu vaccine?

It is not possible to get the flu from the flu vaccine. The vaccine is made from broken down parts of viruses, which are not live, and are not infectious. If you feel unwell after the vaccination the possible causes may be:

- There are many viruses around at the same time as the flu virus. You can become unwell from different viruses.
- The vaccine takes 2 weeks to take effect, so you may have already caught the flu virus.
- Side effects from the flu vaccine can get confused with the flu. These can include: redness and soreness at the injection site, fever, tiredness, and aching muscles. These side effects can start 6-12 hours after your vaccination, and may last up to 2 days.

## Will a flu vaccine protect me against COVID-19?

The flu vaccine itself will not protect against COVID-19. However, getting the flu weakens the immune system and may make it easier to catch COVID-19. The combination of catching the flu and COVID-19 at the same time may lead to a more serious illness than either illness alone. There are new, combined vaccines with flu + COVID-19 being developed, but they are not available yet.

## Is it safe to get the flu vaccine at the same time as the COVID vaccine?

Yes, there is no need for spacing between flu and COVID-19 vaccinations.

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