

Yarn Up Q&A



Q: Why is the health risk to community higher in winter?

A: In the colder months, we naturally tend to gather inside. When we're inside, it's easier for germs to hang around and to move from person to person. To help protect yourself and others, rug up and meet outside whenever possible.

Q: Why are we seeing such a severe flu season this year?

A: For the past two years, flu has largely stayed away from the country because we've had less people travelling into the country, and quarantine for those that have travelled. Without people travelling, flu didn't have a chance to spread in the community. This year, with people travelling again and people coming back to Australia from overseas, flu has started to spread in the community again.

We also had a much earlier start to the flu season this year – about 6 or 7 weeks earlier than normal. In summary, our community has had less exposure, and therefore has developed less natural immunity, and the season has gone on longer.

Q: What is the best way our mobs can protect themselves against flu?

A: The best way to protect yourself against flu is to get your [flu vaccination](#). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mobs have a higher risk of severe illness from flu, particularly as they have a lot of people with other health issues. Like all communities, many of their little bubs won't have been exposed to flu before, and so won't have any natural immunity.

Q: Does the COVID-19 vaccine protect us against flu as well?

A: Unfortunately not, because COVID-19 and flu are two completely different viruses. Even if you've had your COVID-19 vaccination, you still need to get your flu shot as that's what is going to protect you from flu. You can get both COVID-19 and flu vaccinations at the same time.

Q: How do we go about getting a flu vaccination?

A: Flu vaccines are widely available in the community. You can get it from your GP, a pharmacy, or Aboriginal Medical Service. If you're organising a vaccine for one of our bubs under 5 years old, you will need to visit a GP. Flu vaccines are free for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over.

Q: Who is eligible to get an additional COVID-19 winter booster?

A: Everyone aged 50 and over is strongly recommended to get an [additional winter booster](#) 3 months after their first booster or 3 months after leaving self-isolation if you've had COVID-19. It's also strongly recommended that people who are severely immunocompromised, whose immune systems don't work properly to fight bugs, such as those who have had significant operations, are having cancer treatment, some bad lung diseases, etc.

People aged 30 years and over can also get a COVID-19 winter booster if they want to.

Q: If I've already had COVID-19, should I still get a booster?

A: Yes, you should get one if you're eligible to (3 months after you've left self-isolation after having COVID-19).

Even if you've had COVID-19, the natural immunity you may have gained does not reliably protect you into the future. If you get your booster, you will have a combination of vaccine protection and the protection that you may or may not have got from having had COVID-19 itself.

Q: Who can mob talk to if they've got any questions about vaccination?

A: It's really important to get accurate, trusted and reliable advice from health providers, such as your GP or a nurse at the practice, your midwife if you're pregnant, or your Aboriginal Health Worker. This is a worldwide pandemic, and we have lots of information from all around the world on the safety of vaccines which helps inform the health advice. Information on social media or from your friends is not always reliable.

For information about COVID-19 and vaccines, you can call:

- The National Coronavirus Helpline (**1800 020 080**) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can press 'Option 5' for assistance.

Q: What are COVID-19 antiviral medicines and how do they work?

A: COVID-19 is a virus, and to be able to make us sick it needs to multiply in our body. Antiviral medicines stop the virus from being able to multiply in our body. They can greatly reduce the risk of people getting really sick or needing to go to hospital. Not everyone is eligible to get antivirals, but they are very helpful for people at higher risk of severe illness.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 30 and over, with two or more risk factors for severe illness, are eligible for antiviral medicines. All people aged 70 and over are also eligible.

It's a good idea to speak to your doctor now and have a plan if you do test positive to COVID-19. Antiviral medicines work best when taken within 5 days of symptoms starting.

Remember, antiviral medicines are not a substitute for vaccination. Vaccination is still your best protection against COVID-19.

Q: If we or someone in our household tests positive to COVID-19 or flu, what do I need to do? What support is available?

A: Stay home if you feel unwell. This will help stop diseases and viruses from spreading and protect our mob and our community. Just because you're isolating, you're not alone. Remember, if you test positive to COVID-19 you legally have to immediately self-isolate for 7 days.

There's free phone numbers you can reach out to for support and expert health advice:

- Healthdirect 24/7 (**1800 022 222**).
- NSW Health Flu and COVID-19 Care at Home Support Line (**1800 960 933**).
- If you are really unwell and you think you might need to go to hospital, please call **000**.

Q: How can I ease back into normal life and look after my wellbeing during this stage of the pandemic?

A: It's important to know that COVID-19 isn't over yet, and it will probably be around for a while. There are little things we can do to help us live our lives as normally as possible like:

- keeping up to date with our COVID-19 and flu vaccinations
- wearing a mask in crowded areas
- gathering outdoors, and getting fresh air, when getting together in large groups.

COVID-19 has been mentally challenging for everyone the past couple of years. Reach out to your support people, connect to your culture and look after each other.

For the latest COVID-19 and flu information, visit nsw.gov.au