

# Winter 2022: Advice for people with disability



Influenza (flu) and COVID-19 are caused by respiratory viruses. They are spread when people with flu or COVID-19 cough, sneeze, speak or shout. They can also spread by touching a surface or object where drops of the virus have landed. During winter the risk of catching flu or COVID-19 is higher. Both flu and COVID-19 can cause severe illness, especially for people with other health conditions.

This fact sheet is for people with a disability, and their families and carers to help understand how best to prepare for COVID-19 and flu during winter. This information can help guide decisions about using antiviral medications and other important conversations to have with your GP.

## Staying safe this winter

- [If you feel unwell](#), stay at home to reduce the risk of passing your illness to other people, and get tested to diagnose the cause of illness.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing, or use your elbow, not your hands.
- Wash your hands often using soap and water. When you can't wash your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Wear a face mask. Masks provide an extra layer of protection and are strongly recommended in crowded places.
- Reduce close physical contact with people you don't live with. Keep a distance of 1.5m between yourself and other people, where possible.
- Take a [rapid antigen test](#) before social gatherings and ask others to test too.
- Ask disability service providers to take a rapid antigen test before coming into your home.
- Stay up to date with your vaccinations, for both COVID-19 and flu.

## Talk to a GP about your health care management plan

You should discuss the following with your GP:

### 1. Vaccination for COVID-19 and flu

Your best protection against COVID-19 is to make sure that you are up to date with [COVID-19 vaccinations](#), including having a COVID-19 [winter booster](#). If you can't leave your home to go to a GP or vaccination clinic, your GP may arrange COVID-19 vaccination at your home.

The flu virus changes every year which means a new flu vaccine is prepared each year to best match the strains predicted for the coming flu season. People at higher risk of severe illness are eligible for a free flu vaccine under the [National Influenza Vaccination Program](#).

### 2. Antivirals

Antivirals need to be taken as soon as possible after you are exposed or get flu or COVID-19. Talk to your GP about your options for antiviral treatments before you need to take them. Your GP will be able to explain which antivirals are suitable for you and any possible side effects. [Guidance on the use of antivirals](#) is available on the NSW Health website.

### 3. Getting tested if you become unwell

If you have any flu or COVID-19 symptoms, you should get tested immediately. [PCR \(nose and throat swab\) tests](#) can detect multiple respiratory viruses, including [flu](#), [respiratory syncytial virus \(RSV\)](#) and [COVID-19](#) at the same time.

If you can't go to a PCR testing clinic due to disability or a health issue affecting mobility, contact your GP to discuss COVID-19 home testing. If your GP is unable to arrange COVID-19 home testing, your local health district may be able to assist you. For further information contact your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055.

## Exposure or testing positive to COVID-19 or flu

If someone has spent time with you in the two days before they tested positive to COVID-19, you have been exposed to COVID-19 and should follow the advice in the [Information for people exposed to COVID-19](#) and the [Household and close contact guidelines](#).

If you test positive to COVID-19 you must follow the advice in the [Testing positive to COVID-19 and managing COVID-19 safely at home](#) fact sheet. [Easy read resources](#) on [how to self-isolate](#) and [managing COVID-19 at home](#) are available.

If you live in a residential disability care facility or disability group home, follow advice given by your provider during a COVID-19 or flu outbreak. This has been developed for your specific circumstances and may be different to the advice for the general community.