



Australian Government

Department of Health

Chief Medical Officer

Early advice on 2018 Seasonal Influenza Vaccines

- 2018 influenza vaccines will be available from mid-April, subject to vaccine supply.
- In order to improve protection for elderly Australians, two new age-specific influenza vaccines will be available free to those aged 65 years and older.

Dear Colleague

Vaccination remains our best defence against seasonal influenza, which causes significant morbidity and mortality in the Australian community each year. You, as a vaccination provider, play a key role in informing the community about risks associated with influenza and of the importance of influenza vaccination.

Each year, the Australian Government through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) offers the best available influenza vaccines to ensure protection for the Australian community, and will this year provide two new vaccines for people aged 65 years and older.

Key features of 2018 NIP influenza vaccines:

Vaccines for people under 65 years:

- Four age-specific quadrivalent influenza vaccines (QIVs) will be available free to eligible people less than 65 years of age through the NIP. The four vaccines are:
 - FluQuadri Junior® (Sanofi Pasteur) for children aged 6 months to under 3 years;
 - FluQuadri® (Sanofi Pasteur) for people aged 3 years and older;
 - Fluarix® Tetra (GSK) for people aged 3 years and older; and
 - Afluria Quad® (Seqirus) for people aged 18 years and older.
- These QIVs will cover two influenza A and two influenza B viruses, representing currently circulating viruses. The composition of the 2018 vaccines is similar to the 2017 vaccines, however the A(H3N2)-like virus has been updated.

Vaccines for people 65 years and older:

- Two new age-specific trivalent influenza vaccines (TIVs) will be available free to those aged 65 years and older through the NIP. The two vaccines are:
 - Fluzone® High-Dose (Sanofi Pasteur) – which contains four times the antigen dose of the standard dose; and
 - Fludac® (Seqirus) – which contains an adjuvant (MF59) which boosts the immune system's response to the vaccine.

- These TIVs will cover two influenza A viruses (the same A viruses covered by the QIVs) and one influenza B virus (a Yamagata-lineage virus). As in the QIVs, the influenza A(H3N2)-like virus has been updated from the composition of the 2017 vaccines.
- The TIVs will provide better protection for those aged 65 years and older, who are disproportionately affected by influenza A(H3N2). These vaccines have been specifically designed to create a greater immune response than the current QIVs to better protect this vulnerable age group.
- The improved protection of these vaccines against influenza A(H3N2) is likely to outweigh any loss of protection against the alternative B strain not included in these vaccines.
- These two vaccines are seen to provide equivalent protection to each other, with either vaccine being suitable for use in a person aged 65 years and older. These vaccines are not licensed for administration to people aged less than 65 years.
- The QIVs are still available for people 65 years and over through the NIP, however, vaccine experts recommend the specially-formulated TIVs over the QIVs for this age group.

Private market

- Only the QIVs will be available for purchase on the private market.

Timing of vaccination

Recent evidence suggests that protection following influenza vaccination may begin to wane after three to four months, therefore, timing of vaccination should aim to achieve the highest level of protection during the period of influenza virus circulation (typically from **June to September** in Australia, and usually peaking from August).

Providers should continue to offer vaccination throughout the influenza season. This is particularly important for people who become eligible for free vaccination throughout the season such as pregnant women (who should receive the vaccine at any stage during pregnancy) and young children from 6 months of age.

I will write to you again in April with further details about the program, along with a vaccination provider factsheet, and promotional materials for your practice or clinic.

In the meantime, further information about influenza and the NIP, including eligibility for free influenza vaccines, can be accessed through the Department of Health's new immunisation website at health.gov.au/immunisation.

Please share this information with others in your practice who administer or prescribe vaccines, including locums and nurse immunisers.

Thank you for your continued support of NIP influenza vaccines.

Yours sincerely



Professor Brendan Murphy
Chief Medical Officer

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