

PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS



Protection against flu: 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 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
- Fever over 38 °C
- Cough (initially dry)
- Headache
- Muscle and joint pain
- Fatigue, dizziness
- Occasionally sniffles, sore throat and pain when swallowing

How flu is different from colds

Like COVID-19, flu can in some cases cause severe and sometimes life-threatening complications, while this is very rare in colds.

How flu is different from COVID-19

In the current COVID-19 pandemic, coronavirus is completely new to the immune systems of many people. The number of people who can become seriously ill with COVID-19 is therefore significantly higher than the number of people suffering flu complications in a normal flu season. You can protect yourself from winter flu by being vaccinated.

A flu vaccination will only protect you from real flu (Influenza) but not from COVID-19 and all the other coughs and colds going around during the winter.

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.

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to those of flu. Do the Coronavirus Check on www.bag-coronavirus.ch or call a doctor to discuss what to do. Get tested for novel coronavirus as soon as possible if the Coronavirus Check or your doctor recommend it.

If the COVID-19 test result is negative, it is highly recommended that you stay at home for at least 24 hours after the end of symptoms. Avoid contact with others where possible, drink plenty of fluids, and rest.

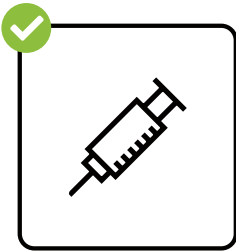
Medicines for pain and fever may relieve your symptoms; get advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

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 rules on
hygiene and social
distancing will also
protect you from
other viruses.

Protection against flu: Rules on hygiene and social distancing

**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.

**Wash your hands thoroughly.**

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

**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.

**Keep your distance or wear a mask.**

As part of the COVID-19 prevention measures, wearing a mask is currently recommended in certain situations. For example, if you are unable to maintain a 1.5 distance from other people in day-to-day life, and if no physical barrier is in place. The recommendations on COVID-19 protection therefore also help reduce the risk of transmission of flu and other pathogens.

**Stay at home if you have symptoms.**

If you experience flu symptoms (e.g. chills, fever, feeling unwell, sore throat, cough, muscle and joint pain), stay at home, or leave your workplace, school etc. as soon as possible and go home. Your symptoms may also mean you have COVID-19. Do the Coronavirus Check on www.bag-coronavirus.ch or call a doctor to discuss what to do. Get tested for novel coronavirus as soon as possible if the Coronavirus Check or your doctor recommend it.

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Protection against flu: Fact sheet for people with a chronic illness and people over the age of 65

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. On the contrary. 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).

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.

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Protection against flu: 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 chronic 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 or retirement homes/care homes. This also includes children 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, people who would like to reduce their risk of catching flu for private and/or professional reasons can also 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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Protection against flu: 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 until the beginning of the flu epidemic. In Switzerland, the flu epidemic usually does not start before the end of December, usually 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 four 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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Protection against flu: 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. Healthy people aged 16 or over can also get a flu vaccination at a pharmacy (see www.impfapotheke.ch).

The flu vaccination season lasts until the beginning of the flu epidemic. In Switzerland, the flu epidemic usually does not start before the end of December, usually in January. Also with a flu vaccination in December still sufficient time remains, so that the body-own immune system can develop a vaccination 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. The vaccine only offers protection against flu viruses (Influenza viruses), and not from all the other germs circulating throughout the winter that cause other coughs and colds.

How effective is it and what are the potential side effects?

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%.

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 four 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, 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.