

# Key Messages

## 2023 Flu Immunisation Programme - April

Approved as of 22 March

### Public Facing Messages

#### Top line messages

- Vaccination gives is the best protection against flu.
- Flu vaccines help protect against the main types of flu viruses, although there's still a chance you might get flu.
- You can get the flu vaccine from 1 April.
- With levels of social interaction back to their normal pre-Covid levels, there is a high risk that the 2023 flu season could be one of the worst experienced in many years.
- Getting immunised now helps to stop the spread of flu around your community.
- The vaccine is free for people at higher risk of getting very sick from the flu including:
  - people aged 65 years and over
  - Māori and Pasifika aged 55 years and over
  - pregnant people
  - people who have a long-term medical condition like diabetes, asthma, or a heart condition (ages 6 months+)
  - children aged 6 months to 12 years
  - people with mental health and addiction issues
- To give you the best protection this winter, make sure you and your whānau are up to date with all of your vaccinations.
- Book your flu and COVID-19 vaccines now at [www.BookMyVaccine.co.nz](http://www.BookMyVaccine.co.nz), call Healthline on 0800 28 29 26, or contact your GP, pharmacy or healthcare provider.

#### Supporting messages

- Each year the strains of the flu virus which are predicted to affect New Zealanders are reviewed and the available vaccines may be changed according to the strains. The protection provided by flu vaccines decreases after a few months, so children and adults need to be re-vaccinated each year before winter.
- The flu can be much worse than a common cold. It can be a very serious illness, particularly for older people, young children, pregnant people and their unborn babies, and people with health conditions such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes, or serious mental health conditions.
- The sooner you get a flu vaccine, the better. It can take up to two weeks after you get the vaccine for your body to start protecting you.
- If you are sick, it is still important to stay away from others, wash your hands, and cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing.

- Even if you don't feel sick, you could still be infected with flu and pass it on to others.
- Many employers provide free flu vaccines to their workforces. If you are offered the flu vaccine by your work, you are encouraged to take the opportunity – it's an important way to protect yourself and help minimise your workplace being disrupted.
- While it is possible to catch flu after immunisation, your symptoms are less likely to be severe.
- The flu and COVID-19 are different viruses, so even if you have had the COVID-19 vaccine, you need to have a flu vaccine to get protection from the flu. Flu vaccines are available from April 1 at general practices, community pharmacies, and some Māori and Pacific providers throughout New Zealand. You can also book online at [bookmyvaccine.nz](http://bookmyvaccine.nz)
- 1.8 million doses of the flu vaccine will be available in 2023.

### **Supporting Messages - Pregnancy and breastfeeding**

- Flu vaccination during pregnancy helps protect both hapū māma and pēpē.
- The flu vaccine is free for pregnant people and can be given at any stage of pregnancy.
- The flu can be much worse than a common cold. It can seriously harm your health and that of your unborn baby. There are several flu-related complications that can affect baby's development in the womb.
- Getting a flu vaccine when you are pregnant protects you and your baby so that when they are born, they have some protection against the flu for the first few months of life. Newborns and young infants are more likely to end up in hospital with the flu than older children, so the protection they receive from you in the womb could make all the difference.
- There is no increased risk of reactions to the vaccine for pregnant people or their unborn babies.
- If you are in your second or third trimester, you can get the flu vaccine and whooping cough booster vaccine at the same visit. Both immunisations are free for pregnant people. You can also get an additional COVID-19 booster if you are eligible.
- You can get a flu jab if you're breastfeeding. By protecting yourself, you're also protecting your baby.
- For more information about the benefits of the flu vaccine, talk to your midwife, Plunket or GP.

### **Supporting Messages – Tamariki aged 6 months to 12 years**

- Tamariki are at a higher risk of catching the flu and of passing it on to others, particularly other members of their whānau who may be older or have underlying health issues.
- The flu vaccine is free for children aged 6 months to 12 years.
- Most tamariki aged 9 years and over need one vaccination each year to get good protection against flu.
- If you have a child under 9 years old, talk to your healthcare provider as they may need one or two vaccinations depending on whether they've had a flu vaccine before.

### **Supporting Messages – People aged 65+**

- As you get older, you're at higher risk of catching flu and developing complications, even if you feel fit and healthy. That's why it's important to get your annual flu vaccination.
- The flu vaccine is free for people aged 65 years and over.
- Having a flu immunisation every year can keep older people healthy for longer.

### **Supporting Messages – People with underlying health conditions / serious mental health or addiction needs**

- If you catch the flu, it can make an existing condition such as asthma, emphysema, heart disease, or diabetes a lot worse.
- If you have serious mental health or addiction needs, you also have a higher risk of getting very sick if you catch the flu.
- The flu vaccine is free for people who have a long-term medical condition like diabetes, asthma, or a heart condition (ages 6 months+), and people with mental health and addiction issues.

### **Māori and Pacific aged 55 and over**

- Key messages need to be tailored to the Māori and Pacific communities and developed with their concerns in mind from the start (rather than being adapted from generalised messages above).
- Māori and Pacific communities may need more information about the need to be immunised and may have concerns about barriers to immunisation (cost and ease-of-access). We also need to be conscious that messages like “keep your whanau safe” may be interpreted as suggesting these communities are not already doing so.
- The above key messages should be reviewed by key Māori stakeholders to see how they might be refreshed.

## **Health Sector Messages**

### **Top line messages**

- The 2023 Flu Immunisation Programme will start on 1 April.
- Those eligible for a free (funded) flu vaccination in 2023 are:
  - people aged 65 years and over
  - Māori and Pasifika aged 55 years and over
  - pregnant people
  - people who have a long-term medical condition like diabetes, asthma, or a heart condition (ages 6 months+)
  - children aged 6 months to 12 years
  - people with mental health and addiction issues
- The eligibility criteria are the same as in 2022, with the same cohorts again being eligible for a free flu vaccination with two exceptions – Māori and Pacific 55+ and children aged 6 months to 12 years

are now also eligible. If you currently provide flu vaccinations, please promote this opportunity to parents and caregivers of children aged 6 months and over who may not be aware that a free flu vaccine is now available.

- We encourage vaccinators to check whether tamariki are up to date with all immunisations, including MMR and COVID-19 as appropriate.
- Having vaccination conversations, offering opportunistic vaccinations and taking a whānau-centred approach to vaccination will help increase vaccination coverage.
- [Book My Vaccine](#) can now be used by consumers to make Flu vaccine bookings from 1 April. If you are offering the flu vaccine, [please click here](#) to learn how you can include your location and appointments on the site.
- People have their flu vaccination at the same time as their COVID-19 vaccination.
- Thank you to everyone who is involved in vaccination efforts. Your continued support is essential in helping protect our communities and helping to take pressure off the overall health system.

### **Health Workforce Immunisation**

- A healthy and resilient workforce is critical to the successful operation of our health system, especially during the winter season.
- In 2023, our goal is to achieve 80% flu immunisation coverage for district employed health and disability workers.
- Please make this a priority for you and your teams from 1 April.