

# Are you ready for the winter flu? Things you need to know - Medshield

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Winter is almost here, and the pesky flu virus will surely make its extreme annual visit. Coupled with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, taking measures to prevent the flu is more important than ever. Fortunately, there are many steps you can take to reduce your risk of getting the flu and protect yourself and others around you.

Get your flu shot from April.



The best way to prevent the flu is to get yearly flu (influenza) vaccination. The vaccine stimulates your immune system to produce antibodies that will protect you against the virus if you are exposed to it. Doctors recommend that everyone over six months of age, especially those at high risk of complications from the flu, get vaccinated. This includes children under five years (but older than six months), people over 65, pregnant women, obese people, and people with chronic diseases. Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others, but if more people are vaccinated, there is a smaller chance that the flu virus will infect others.

The flu season starts in May, and it takes about two weeks for the body to form antibodies against the flu virus. You can get vaccinated at any time during flu season, but the vaccine won't protect you if the flu virus has already infected you. Typically, the vaccine is available from mid-April. You can go to your pharmacy network according to your Medshield benefit option and ask for the flu shot for you and your family. You don't need a prescription, and you can have the injection immediately.

## What is covered by medical aid?

Most medical schemes cover the cost of the flu vaccine, as it is considered a preventative measure. However, the amount and specific cover details can vary depending on your plan and provider. Some medical schemes may require you to use a specific provider or location for the flu vaccine, while others may allow you to get the vaccine at any provider or pharmacy. You must check with your medical aid provider to understand your cover and potential out-of-pocket costs. All Medshield Medical Scheme members over 18 qualify for the flu vaccination – covered under the Wellness Benefit on all Medshield benefit options or plans.

In addition to the flu vaccine, schemes may cover other preventative measures, such as antiviral medications and home-based care for those infected with the flu. Again, cover may vary depending on your specific plan and provider, so checking with your medical aid to understand your cover is essential. At Medshield, we offer this benefit across all our options.

### More tips to prevent the flu this season

**#1: Wash your hands** – One of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of the flu virus is to wash your hands frequently and thoroughly. Use soap and warm water and scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to wash your hands before eating, after using the bathroom, and after touching any surfaces that may be contaminated with the flu virus. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser instead.

**#2: Avoid close contact** – The flu virus is highly contagious and can be spread through respiratory droplets when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes. Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and if you are sick, stay home to avoid spreading the virus to others.

**#3: Get plenty of rest** – Sleep is crucial for a healthy immune system. Get at least seven to eight hours of sleep per night to help your body fight off any potential infections.

**#4: Stay hydrated** – Drinking plenty of fluids helps to keep your mucous membranes moist and helps to flush out any potential viruses. Aim for at least eight glasses of water per day, and consider drinking hot liquids like tea or broth, which can help to soothe a sore throat and provide additional hydration.

**#5: Eat a healthy diet** – A balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals can help boost your immune system and prevent the flu. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean protein sources, and healthy fats. Avoid processed and sugary foods, which can weaken your immune system.

**#6: Stay warm and dry** – Cold and damp weather can weaken your immune system and make you more susceptible to infections like the flu. Wear warm, layered clothing, and keep your feet and hands warm and dry. Avoid prolonged exposure to cold and damp weather, and take breaks indoors to warm up if necessary.

There is no need to suffer through days or weeks of the flu when there are effective measures you can take. Furthermore, preventing and reducing influenza severity could decrease hospitalisations and intensive care unit admissions and alleviate stress on the healthcare system. When it comes to the flu, prevention is always better than cure.

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