



WINTER VACCINATION INFORMATION FOR AGED CARE PROVIDERS



Introduction

The cooler weather brings increased risk for older people in Australia. People aged 65 years and over are more likely to experience severe illness and hospitalisation from influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

As an aged care worker or carer, you play an important role in protecting the health of the people you support. Your encouragement to get vaccinated can make a real difference.

How to use this guide

This guide is designed to help you discuss vaccination with aged care residents.

Starting these conversations can be challenging but increasing vaccination among older adults is one of the most effective ways to protect them from serious illness caused by influenza, COVID-19 and RSV.

Be ready to:

- Reassure patients or aged care residents that vaccination is the best way to prepare for the winter months
- Listen carefully and respond to any concerns
- Direct your patients or residents to Australian Government or state and territory government information about winter vaccinations and encourage them to learn more.

Starting the conversation

While it is never too late to vaccinate, it is best to do so before the cooler months, when respiratory viruses are more common. Protection is strongest in the first three to four months after vaccination.

This makes the pre-winter months an important time to start the conversation, so patients and aged care residents can be vaccinated before winter for the best possible protection.

The changing weather provides a timely reminder to discuss the need to prepare for winter with your patients or residents. This includes taking simple steps to stay well, such as getting vaccinated against influenza, COVID-19 and RSV.

Patients and aged care residents may have questions or concerns about vaccination, including whether it is still necessary. You can support them by acknowledging their concerns, listening carefully and providing them with clear information about vaccine safety, side effects and eligibility, for example:

Influenza (flu)

People aged 65 years and over are recommended to get a flu vaccine every twelve months, which is free through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) with their Medicare card.

COVID-19

People aged 65 years and over are recommended to get a COVID-19 vaccine every twelve months, or every six months for people aged 75 and over. The COVID-19 vaccine is free, regardless of Medicare or visa status.

RSV

The RSV vaccine is recommended and available free through the NIP, with a Medicare card, for people aged 75 years and over, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 60 years and over.

Vaccine safety

Vaccines used in Australia are rigorously tested and closely monitored, and most side effects after vaccination are mild and short-term, such as a sore arm or feeling tired. Speak with your doctor or vaccination provider if you have any concerns.



Ask open-ended questions

When talking about vaccination, it's important to ensure patients and aged care residents feel comfortable sharing their views and don't feel pressured. Encourage open conversations by giving them time to ask questions and express any concerns.

Start with simple, open questions:

How are you preparing for winter?

People may talk about bringing out warmer clothes, enjoying seasonal food or activities they like to do during winter. This is an easy way to get them to think about how they prepare for the season.

What do you do to stay healthy during winter?

You may ask if they have any health concerns as winter approaches. This may include talking about how they keep warm or prepare their home, and if there are any other steps they take to protect their health during the colder months.

This creates an opportunity to discuss the flu season and whether they have thought about protecting themselves from respiratory illnesses. You can also learn who they rely on for advice, such as family, friends, their doctor or pharmacist. This can help guide how you support them.

Have you spoken to your doctor or pharmacist about protecting yourself from serious illness this winter?

Many older people have trusted relationships with their healthcare providers. Talking about this can help you understand their approach to vaccination and encourage them to seek advice from their doctor or pharmacist about protection against influenza, COVID-19 and RSV.

If they have already made plans to get vaccinated, reinforce the importance of this step in protecting against serious illness.

How involved is your family in your health decisions?

Some older adults rely on family members or friends for guidance and support on health matters. Understanding this can help you encourage conversations with family members and support shared decision-making.

Responding to questions and concerns

The following Q&A can support you in addressing common questions and encouraging aged care residents to protect themselves against influenza, COVID-19 and RSV.

Q Why is it so important to get vaccinated?

A Viruses, including influenza and COVID-19, can change over time, and older adults are at higher risk of severe illness. RSV can also cause serious respiratory illness. Keeping up to date with recommended vaccines helps protect against these illnesses and reduces the risk of hospitalisation, especially for those with underlying health conditions.

Q When is the best time to get vaccinated?

A Influenza vaccines are available from March or April. Getting vaccinated from April onwards helps ensure you're protected during the peak flu season (typically June to September). Protection is strongest in the first three to four months after vaccination. People aged 65 years and over are recommended to get a COVID-19 vaccine every twelve months, or every six months for people aged 75 and over. The RSV vaccine is recommended and available free through the NIP, with a Medicare card, for people aged 75 years and over, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 60 years and over.

Q Do I have to pay to get the vaccines?

A COVID-19 vaccines are free, regardless of Medicare or visa status. Influenza vaccines are available free under the NIP for people aged 65 years and over. RSV vaccinations are available free under the NIP for people aged 75 years and over, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 60 years and over.

Q How easy is it to get vaccinated?

A Vaccines are widely available and easy to access. You can get vaccinated by your doctor or pharmacist. Many pharmacies offer convenient booking or walk-in options. In aged care settings, providers can help residents to access vaccination.

Q Is it safe to get the vaccines together?

A You can safely get influenza, COVID-19 and RSV vaccines at the same appointment or separately. Speak with your doctor about your eligibility for other recommended free NIP vaccines.

Q Will there be any side effects?

A Most people experience mild, short-term side effects after vaccination, such as a sore arm or feeling tired. Serious side effects are rare. If you have concerns, ask your vaccination provider. Vaccines used in Australia are thoroughly tested to ensure they are safe and effective and are closely monitored even after use.

Q Is information available in my language?

A Yes. Translated resources about winter vaccinations are available in 14 languages: Arabic, Cantonese, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Korean, Macedonian, Mandarin, Punjabi, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese. You can access this information by visiting [health.gov.au/winter-vaccinations/translated-resources](https://www.health.gov.au/winter-vaccinations/translated-resources)

You can download and share these resources with your aged care residents or those in your care.