

Influenza vaccine supply

Information about vaccine supply

Following unprecedented demand for flu vaccines this year, supplies of the flu vaccine are becoming short across all Australian States and Territories.

This shortage is being seen in both the private and government funded areas and across most types of influenza vaccines available from pharmaceutical companies.

Because of this shortage, the Victorian Government is asking all immunisation providers to ensure that people in particular risk groups are given priority for receiving flu vaccine.

Prioritisation of vaccine for risk groups

Immunisation providers have been informed they must follow the list below when administering flu vaccine to ensure that Government funded influenza vaccine is offered to our most at risk populations.

Priority groups for receiving free flu vaccine:

- Children aged 6 months to less than 5 years*
- People aged 5 years and over who have certain medical conditions which increase the risk of influenza disease complications; for example, severe asthma, lung or heart disease, low immunity or diabetes*
- Pregnant women anytime during pregnancy
- Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over
- Adults aged 65 years and older

*Any child aged less than 9 years of age who is receiving influenza vaccine needs to receive two doses of flu vaccine one month apart in their first year of flu vaccination. However, if two doses weren't given in their first year and the child is now in their second year or later of receiving the vaccine, a single dose only is given.

I have a child under 5, what should I do?

Vaccine providers have been advised to prioritise vaccine for children aged six months to less than five years. Call ahead to your vaccine provider to ensure they have vaccine available and make an appointment to get your child vaccinated.

If your usual vaccine provider doesn't have any vaccine available, consider other health services in your area.

My child is aged over six months and has a serious medical condition, what should I do?

Call ahead to your vaccine provider to ensure they have vaccine available and make an appointment to get your child vaccinated. Some child hospitals are also prioritising flu vaccines for their in-patients and out-patients who have medical conditions that put them at greater risk of complications from influenza.

If your usual vaccine provider doesn't have any vaccine available, consider other health services in your area.

My child has already had their flu shot for the first time but I was told they needed a second dose, what should I do?

Call ahead to your vaccine provider to ensure they have vaccine available and make an appointment to get your child vaccinated.

If your usual vaccine provider doesn't have any vaccine available, consider other health services in your area.

I have a serious medical condition, what should I do?

If your GP says you are eligible for the free influenza vaccine and you haven't already had your flu vaccine, call ahead to your GP to ensure they have vaccine

available and make an appointment to get your flu vaccine.

If your usual GP doesn't have any vaccine available, consider other GP practices in your area.

How has this happened?

Despite experts estimating high levels of vaccine stock required prior to the season, demand for the vaccine has been significant and the whole system has under-ordered vaccine in relation to the overwhelming demand.

More influenza vaccine has been distributed in 2018 to date than in all of 2017.

This may be in part because of last year's severe flu season and advice to Victorians to protect themselves this year by getting immunised.

In particular, parents have taken up the call to protect their children with a significant uptake of vaccination for children aged six months to under five years.

More pharmacies than ever are able to provide influenza vaccine this year. The ease of accessibility to influenza vaccine is increasing the demand for more vaccine stock.

What is the Victorian Government doing to address the issue?

We are working with the Australian Government and our vaccine providers to ensure that those most at risk are able to receive a vaccine to protect themselves this winter.

Victoria's remaining stocks of influenza vaccine are being distributed in a rationed manner to the highest priority groups and discussions are underway to identify options to boost supply of vaccine.

Given this extraordinary demand and the supply constraints, it is important that all states and territories work urgently with the Australian Government to help alleviate any shortfall in influenza vaccine supply.

The Department is urgently exploring options for procurement of additional stocks of vaccine.

What are the next steps

The Department will continue to work with the Australian Government and our vaccine providers to ensure that those most at risk are able to receive a vaccine to protect themselves this winter. We will ask clinics with good supplies to make this information

known to patients to ensure that those most vulnerable people are able to get access to vaccines.

We will continue to explore all available options for procuring more vaccine stock and work with the Australian Government to identify further sources of influenza vaccine.

Why can't Victoria order more vaccine?

The department is urgently exploring all options for ordering more vaccine but as demand has been so significant, there is a significant shortage. Some stocks are anticipated in the coming weeks, however prioritisation of those most at risk is still required.

Can more vaccine be made?

The department is working with the Australian government to determine whether manufacturers can boost supply in this way.

When will we know more?

Once the Department has explored all options for getting additional stocks of vaccine and the stocktake of current supplies is completed, we will communicate with all vaccine providers, health services and the Victorian public about the supply available and how we are managing supply to best protect those Victorians most at need.

How many vaccines have already been distributed this year?

To date, more than 1.54 million doses have been distributed to immunisation providers around Victoria specifically for at risk groups in the community, compared with 1.18 million in 2017 and 1.15 million in 2016 at the same time.

In the opening weeks of May, most days saw over 50,000 doses of influenza vaccine distributed by the Department of Health and Human Services to immunisation providers across the state.