

Flu shots free for 2024

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JOINT STATEMENT

Premier

The Honourable Steven Miles

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women

The Honourable Shannon Fentiman

- Queenslanders can now book in for a free flu vaccination ahead of the 2024 flu season.
- From 1 January to 24 March, there have been more than 7,000 flu cases reported, with 713 admitted to hospital.
- Close to 1 million people received a flu vaccination during free programs in 2022 and 2023.

The Miles Labor Government is backing free flu vaccinations in 2024, as part of a \$40 million commitment to ease pressure on hospital emergency departments this flu season.

The initiative also puts money back in the pockets of Queenslanders and their families.

All Queensland residents over the age of 6 months are eligible to receive the free vaccine from vaccination providers, including GPs and pharmacies. Bookings are now open.

The peak season for influenza varies from year to year, but typically starts in May and lasts until around October, with most cases typically recorded in August.

Queenslanders are encouraged to consider vaccination ahead of the peak season to ensure coverage over the winter months.

This program is an extension of those that ran during the 2022 and 2023 seasons and saw 912,000 Queenslanders take up the offer.

Influenza vaccine uptake dropped significantly in 2023 compared to the year prior, with just a third of Queenslanders being vaccinated against the flu. Flu vaccination uptake was particularly low last year among children aged five years and under.

The 2024 Free Flu Vaccination Program, concluding on 30 September 2024, aims to encourage more Queenslanders to get vaccinated, while putting money back into the pockets of families who do not qualify for a free vaccination under the Commonwealth's National Immunisation Program (NIP).

The influenza vaccine can be co-administered with a COVID-19 booster dose.

Quotes attributable to the Premier:

"Many people have vaccine fatigue after the pandemic, which means we are recording significant drops in vaccinations against things like the flu.

"While it might seem like the common cold, influenza can be deadly which is why it's so important to get a flu shot every single year.

"Our free flu vaccination program is an easy way to get yourself covered ahead of winter without the barrier of cost, and has helped almost one million people get protected so far.

"It's our hope that all eligible Queenslanders, especially the vulnerable, roll up their sleeve and get vaccinated. It's the best way to protect yourself and those around you this flu season."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services Shannon Fentiman:

"Every year, we see hundreds of hospitalisations due to influenza.

"Already this year, more than 700 people have been hospitalised due to serious illness from influenza and as of 25 March 2024, 83 Queenslanders are currently in hospital due to influenza.

"In 2023, Queensland recorded more than 74,000 flu cases, and sadly, 144 deaths were reported.

"Since the start of this year, 7,000 flu cases have been reported, as well as 11 deaths due to influenza.

"Getting vaccinated every year is the best way for people to protect themselves and their loved ones against the flu.

"The Queensland Free Flu Vaccination Program has now been running for three consecutive years, helping to ease the financial barrier for all Queenslanders wanting to get vaccinated.

"We know nearly all people presenting to hospital with the flu last year had not been vaccinated, which puts significant pressure on our emergency departments.

“Making it free ahead of the peak flu season keeps people safe and ensures our health system is available for Queenslanders who need it most.

“The launch of this year’s free flu campaign follows the free Meningococcal B vaccine for eligible children and adolescents, as well as last week’s announcement of a free RSV immunisation program for more than 70,000 eligible infants and young children.

“We hope the combination of these free immunisation campaigns will lead to reduced hospital presentations and admissions this cold and flu season.”

Quotes attributable to Acting Chief Health Officer Dr Catherine McDougall:

“The impact of influenza on the Queensland community every year is substantial.

“Influenza causes disruption in households, schools and workplaces, as well as increased demand on our health services.

“This year alone, we have seen hundreds of people already hospitalised with influenza, with people aged 65 and over most affected.

“These hospitalisations are concerning given we are still a few months off from the peak flu season.

“We say this every year – but it really is so important to get vaccinated against the flu.

“Annual flu vaccination is the best way to protect against severe disease and complications.

“We hope to see more Queenslanders get vaccinated this year against the flu, particularly pregnant people, children aged between six months and five years, and those aged 65 and over.

“I encourage every Queenslander to take advantage of a free flu vaccination, as this may also help break the chain of transmission.

“I also encourage Queenslanders to make sure they, as well as their families and loved ones, are up to date with vaccination against other respiratory illnesses including COVID-19 and whooping cough.

“It’s also a timely reminder to continue to practice good hygiene habits, such as washing hands regularly and staying home when you’re sick.”

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