

# the 2014 influenza guide for general practitioners



# ISG

Influenza Specialist Group



The ISG recommends  
annual influenza vaccination for  
optimal protection.

## Risks of influenza and benefits of vaccination

Influenza is a potentially fatal disease that is estimated to cause more deaths than accidents on roads:

**1500–3500**   
INFLUENZA DEATHS ANNUALLY


Influenza infection usually has different symptoms and causes a more severe illness than most other common viral respiratory infections and may be life threatening to certain people; it should not be confused with the common cold!

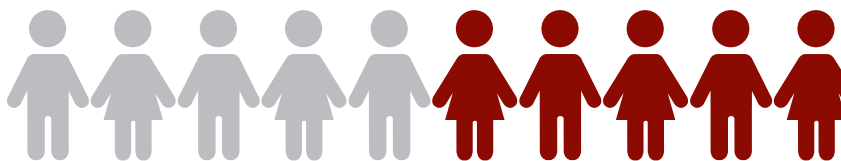
Latest ISG research shows that **48%** of people  
AT AN INCREASED RISK OF COMPLICATIONS FROM  
INFLUENZA ARE NOT VACCINATED ANNUALLY.

Influenza in Australia  
results in more than

**18,000**   
HOSPITALISATIONS each year.

Over **80%** of hospital admissions for  
confirmed or suspected influenza occur in  
those AGED UNDER 65 YEARS.<sup>1</sup>

  
The influenza  
vaccine strains for  
the 2014 season  
have changed since  
last season.  
(WHO)



## Influenza prevention in general practice

**Doctors are key influencers in people getting their  
influenza vaccination.**

- **86%** of Australians at risk of influenza complications didn't get their flu shot BECAUSE THEIR DOCTOR DID NOT ADVISE OR REMIND THEM.
- A 2013 ISG study showed that **72%** of at-risk people WOULD BE CONVINCED TO GET A FLU SHOT by their GP or specialist doctor.<sup>2</sup>

**Some simple steps that can help facilitate influenza vaccination  
programs in general practice:**

- **Flagging records** of patients who are at increased risk of influenza complications. ISG research shows that 36% of people would be MORE LIKELY TO GET A FLU SHOT if they had an electronic or written reminder before the flu season.

- **Reminding patients** of the benefits of vaccination, including substantial reductions in hospitalization. Research shows that 31% of people at an increased risk of influenza complications in Australia ARE NOT AWARE THAT THEY ARE IN DANGER of complications.<sup>2</sup>
- **Organising vaccination clinics** to MINIMIZE DISRUPTION to normal practice schedules.



## Who should be vaccinated?<sup>3</sup>

Annual influenza vaccination is recommended for any person (6 months+) who wishes to reduce the risk of becoming ill with influenza. People at an increased risk of influenza complications include:

- **Older adults** (65+)
- **Indigenous Australians** (15+)
- **Pregnant women**
- **Residents of nursing homes** or other long-term facilities
- Those with **underlying medical conditions** (such as heart conditions, asthma, diabetes, chronic neurological disease, renal and metabolic disease, and impaired immunity).



*This group may qualify for free vaccine under the Immunise Australia's National Immunisation Program.*



## Influenza and children

It is important that children at particular risk of severe complications from influenza are vaccinated. The Australia Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) has made a number of recommendations with regard to childhood influenza vaccinations, which are summarized below.



**Children from 6 months to 5 years of age MUST NOT receive BioCSL's Fluvax®.** BioCSL's Fluvax® has not been registered for use in this age group since late 2010 because of an unexpected increase in reports of fevers and febrile convulsions. In children aged  $\geq 5$  to  $<10$  years, an alternative brand is preferred. BioCSL's Fluvax® may be used if no alternative is available and parents are informed of the potential increased risk of fever.

**DO NOT USE IN CHILDREN UNDER 5 YEARS**

## Influenza and pregnancy

"Vaccinating pregnant women against influenza gives a 3 for 1 benefit:

- protects the woman during pregnancy and in the early months of motherhood
- protects the young infant by transplacental antibodies
- protects the young infant by antibodies in breast milk."

ELIZABETH MCCARTHY  
Senior Lecturer, Department of  
Obstetrics and Gynaecology,  
University of Melbourne,  
Perinatal Centre, Mercy Hospital  
for Women



## Other risk factors

Other conditions that might put people at a high risk of influenza complications include:

- **Obesity:** Obese (body mass index [BMI]  $\geq 30$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>) or morbidly obese patients (BMI  $\geq 40$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>) appeared to be at increased risk of influenza-associated intensive care unit (ICU) admission and death.



- **Stroke:** A new study shows that a seasonal flu shot is linked to a lower risk of major cardiovascular events like a heart attack or stroke.
- **Tobacco smoking:** Some research studies show an increase in influenza infections among smokers compared to nonsmokers. There is a higher mortality rate for smokers than nonsmokers from influenza.
- **Down syndrome:** This recommendation is based on the increased risk for illness and complications among people with neurodevelopmental disorders.



## Influenza and heart attacks

"New research suggests that the flu shot seems to almost halve the risk of heart attacks in middle-aged people with narrowed arteries. The study adds to evidence that influenza vaccine could be protective against heart attacks and cardiovascular disease, which is the leading cause of death globally and in Australia."

PROFESSOR RAINA MACINTYRE  
Head of the School of Public  
Health and Community Medicine,  
Faculty of Medicine at the  
University of New South Wales  
and Professor of Infectious  
Diseases Epidemiology



### REFERENCES:

- 1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. National Hospital Morbidity Database. Separation, Patient, Day and Average Length of Stay By Principal Diagnosis in ICD-10-AM, Australia 1998-99 to 2007-08. Last viewed February 2010.
- 2 ISG 2013 Survey: "At risk group and flu vaccination"
- 3 Australian Immunisation Handbook, 10th Edition (2013)

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The Influenza Specialist Group (ISG) is a not for profit organization, consisting of medical and scientific specialists from around Australia and New Zealand, with an expertise in influenza.

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