

## **RCPA says Australians are more vulnerable to Influenza in 2022**

Due to a low uptake of influenza vaccines in 2021, and the very low circulation of influenza virus globally over the past two years, the [Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia](#) (RCPA) warns that Australians are more likely to be vulnerable to influenza this year. Despite vaccination fatigue, the RCPA recommends anyone aged six months and over to get the influenza vaccine in order to prevent widespread illness and even deaths from influenza. Those who have not received their COVID-19 vaccine or are eligible for a booster or “winter dose” are encouraged to get both vaccines at the same time.

RCPA Fellow, Dr Jenny Robson, Pathologist-in-Charge of the Department of Microbiology Sullivan Nicolaides Pathology, says that because influenza activity is particularly difficult to predict this year, people should get vaccinated as soon as possible.

“With the relatively recent opening of international borders, it is highly likely that we will see more influenza cases in Australia in 2022. Therefore, the current recommendation is that all people aged six months and older should be vaccinated against influenza as soon as possible. This is particularly important for children aged six months to five years, adults over 65 years, individuals with other illnesses that can make them more susceptible to severe illness, first Nations people and pregnant women. The influenza vaccine can be safely given at any time during pregnancy and provides protection for both mother and baby.

“It’s a good idea to remember that if anyone still needs to get the booster for COVID-19 then both vaccines can be given at the same time. In fact, over 65s should also consider Pneumovax, if it is due, which helps to protect against pneumococcal disease. All of these vaccines can be administered safely at the same time,” said Dr Robson.

The peak incidence of influenza usually occurs around July and September; however, the virus is notoriously difficult to predict, and the RCPA says this year’s peak could be sooner, with cases of Influenza A already appearing in the community.

“Measures which protected us from COVID-19 were also effective in reducing the circulation of influenza. This includes the closure of international borders, quarantine for international travellers, and non-pharmaceutical interventions such as wearing masks, hand hygiene, social distancing, working from home and school closures. However, we now have lower levels of protection in the community, meaning the virus can spread more quickly. This is due to less overall uptake of the influenza vaccine last year and reduced recent exposure to the virus. We, therefore, need to increase vaccine coverage in the community, not only to protect ourselves but to protect our vulnerable, just like we have with COVID-19,” said Dr Robson.

Influenza vaccination reduces the number of individuals that attend medical practices and Emergency Departments, therefore, preserving the capacities for those that need these services. The vaccination is safe and there are very few scientifically valid reasons for people not to get vaccinated.

Influenza vaccines through the National Immunisation Program (NIP) became available in April 2021. To check eligibility, check the [Government website](#). Since early 2020 it’s a requirement that all administered Influenza vaccines are now registered on the Australian Immunisation Register. It is important to note that there are age specific recommendations, which should be checked for the available vaccines.

For further information on the RCPA, please visit [www.rcpa.edu.au](http://www.rcpa.edu.au) or see updates on Facebook - @PathologyRCPA, Twitter - @RCPAPresident, @PathologyRCPA, or Instagram - @the\_rcpa #RCPA #pathology #MedicineIsPathology.

**ENDS**



**About the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia:**

The RCPA is the leading professional organisation representing pathologists, medical specialists and scientists who provide pathology testing in Australasia. Its mission is to train and support pathologists and to improve the use of pathology testing to achieve better health-care.

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