

Influenza Vaccination during COVID-19

Background

The annual influenza vaccination is important to reduce the severity and spread of seasonal influenza. With the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to ensure that as many people as possible receive the influenza vaccination before the start of the influenza season (June to September). The influenza vaccination does not protect against COVID-19. However, influenza can lower a person's immunity and make them more susceptible to other illnesses, such as COVID-19. High rates of influenza vaccination will help to reduce the severity of influenza for the patient and limit additional pressure on health resources.

This year, free influenza vaccinations are available to the following at-risk groups:

- all children from 6 months to less than 5 years of age
- Primary school years aged ≥ 5 to Year 6
- ≥ 5 to <65 years - aboriginal and/or medically at risk
- ≥ 65 years
- Pregnant women
- WA Health System Staff only

This document recommends steps, based on currently available evidence, to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission to staff and patients while also ensuring as many patients as possible can receive the influenza vaccination. The 2020 influenza vaccination is recommended as soon as supply is received due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [WA Immunisation Schedule](#) provides updated government funded eligibility for influenza vaccination

Identify & notify patients

We recommend to also use a targeted approach to identify patients and notifying patients, utilising your practice software and the PenCS suite of tools. WAPHA practice support staff can assist with data extraction and recipes.

- Consider how many patients can be scheduled for the day considering vaccine supply, vaccine storage capacity and currently staffing levels
- Collect data from PenCat4
- Target at risk and eligible groups first
- Refer to [ATAGI advice](#) for medical conditions associated with increased risk of influenza complications eligible for NIP funded vaccination.
- Use SMS/Phone calls to target this group when vaccine supply has arrived

Venue & Signage

To limit the potential spread of COVID-19 and to ensure that at-risk patients are able to access the influenza vaccination, the follow should be considered:

- Allocate a dedicated vaccination day where patients can attend for a scheduled influenza vaccination. On this allocated day, only telehealth/phone consultations should be available for issues other than the influenza vaccination.
- Book at-risk patients (in the groups listed above) to attend for their vaccination early in the day (where possible), so they are not waiting for long periods in common areas
- Ensure equipment and area available to manage adverse events
- Ensure confidentiality is maintained
- Arrange a process and a checklist to assess each patient as they arrive for their vaccination prior to entering the practice. This could include keeping doors locked and ask patients to call once they are outside
- Ensure regular cleaning of practice using both detergent and alcohol based disinfectant.
- Ensure adequate hand sanitizer and/or handwashing facilities for both practice staff and patients, to ensure the 5 moments of hand hygiene can be completed.¹
- Display [posters demonstrating proper hand washing](#) technique in handwashing areas.
- Remove children's toys from waiting area during the COVID-19 outbreak, as these might promote the spread of the virus.

Signage should be displayed at the entrances of all clinics containing the following information:

Due to the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, this service is taking measures to protect the community. It is vital that the instructions are followed:

- *Only one parent/guardian should accompany a child into the waiting area/consultation.*
- *Clients should not attend the clinic if they have symptoms of a respiratory infection (such as fever, or a sore throat, or a runny nose, or shortness of breath or a cough) or are in home isolation.*
- *Attendees should wash their hands or use hand sanitiser provided at the entrance to the reception or waiting area.*

** Consideration should be given to the translation of all signage and messaging into other key community languages.

¹ <https://www.hha.org.au/hand-hygiene/5-moments-for-hand-hygiene>

Social distancing

Pre-appointment

- Practices should consider sending SMS reminders to patients with upcoming appointments for the influenza vaccination, instructing them not to attend if they are feeling unwell.
- Patients should be advised not to arrive in advance of their appointment. They should arrive on time to minimise the number of people in the waiting area.
- To prevent long wait times, appointment times should be staggered to ensure sufficient time between appointments.

At the practice

- Arrange client seating and queueing for administration so that there is at least 1.5 metres between clients.
- Limit the number of people attending unnecessarily. For example, adults who do not require a carer should attend alone, limit to just one parent accompanying the child for immunisation.
- If numerous patients arrive at once and there is not enough seating, a staff member should be available to monitor queueing, and maintain the order and flow of clients into the administration area.
- Sit clients at least 1.5 metres from administration staff desk on check in and 1.5 metres from other clients in the waiting area.
- Minimise physical contact with patient record documents.
- If a walk in service for immunisations is provided, ensure that there are processes in place to maintain adequate social distancing.
- Use a single use pre-immunisation checklist for each client rather than a laminated version.
- Avoid sharing pens or writing implements where possible. Vaccination providers should keep a pen for their personal use and wipe down any shared stationary between visits.

Post vaccination

- Consider a separate room for clients to wait post vaccination to maintain the limit of 1 person per 4 square meters.
- Consider patients waiting outside for 15 minutes after vaccination in dedicated area with triage nurse:

<https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/vaccination-procedures/after-vaccination>

'Drive-up' influenza vaccination clinics

The Communicable Disease Control Directorate (CDCD) has released the following guidance for practices considering vehicle-based influenza vaccinations including after care and cold chain considerations:

https://mcusercontent.com/32cc4a56e0e39b38a4d4cf223/files/ecca72f8-b9da-49db-aded-6e359b834f74/IMMUNISATION_PROVIDER_UPDATE_2_April_2020.pdf

Examples of current implementation in General Practice:

- Pre-planned and pre booked day dedicated for influenza vaccination, starting with at risk/eligible groups.
- Use of carpark space dedicated for the clinic, patient drives in, vaccinated in car, with a separate staffed area at the end of the carpark for patients to park for their observation period. Communication between staff member for final clearance to patient leaving
- Utilising a room at the back of the clinic that can be accessed via a separate entrance, patients waiting in their cars close by for the post vaccine observation period, with nurse present.
- Utilising an outdoor undercover area, patients then wait in their cars or dedicated chairs with social distance adherence
- Example of current models:
 - <https://www.facebook.com/coremedical1/videos/578933466302055/>
 - <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsqg/clinical/outdoor-flu-vax-clinic-a-hit-with-patients>

Dedicated timeslot *example* for drive up clinic:

10 people are to be booked into each time slot (amend based on staffing levels and carpark space available):

- 1) 0830
- 2) 0845
- 3) 0900
- 4) 0915
- 5) 1000
- 6) 1015
- 7) 1030
- 8) 1045

** You must fill up each 10 places in the designated time slot before moving to the next slot.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Standard precautions for providing immunisations apply. These are:
 - routine hand hygiene
 - using personal protective equipment, as appropriate
 - handling and disposing of sharps
 - routine cleaning of the work environment.
- PPE additional to that normally used as part of your routine immunisation service is not recommended.
- PPE is only necessary for health care workers seeing patients with symptoms consistent with coronavirus (COVID-19), where there is a much higher risk of transmission.

Resources and further information:

Visit the [Practice Assist COVID-19](#) news and alerts page for up to date information including MBS telehealth information, webinars and FAQs.

Visit HealthPathways WA for the [2020 Influenza HealthPathway](#). Email healthpathways@wapha.org.au if you require your username and password.

For additional resources and access to updated information about coronavirus (COVID-19), please go to health.wa.gov.au/coronavirus

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Subscribe to Vaccine Updates for CDCD Immunisation Provider Updates first hand:
<https://health.us20.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=32cc4a56e0e39b38a4d4cf223&id=ed01e3d6a4>