



## POSITION STATEMENT

# Flu Season & Flu Vaccines

## Our position

The Leukaemia Foundation endorses the Department of Health's recommendations for people receiving the influenza (flu) vaccination which includes vaccination for those with higher risk for complications from the flu including people with a blood cancer, or who are immunocompromised. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important to be vigilant about the flu.

If you have or have had a blood cancer, or are immunocompromised, your treatment team or haematologist may recommend you receive a second flu vaccine dose to make sure you're as protected as possible from the flu.

Before booking your flu vaccine appointment, make sure you speak with your treatment team or haematologist about what vaccinations you may need and should have.



### **Alignment with Patient First Strategy Pillar:**

***Improve the experience for all those affected by blood cancer***

## What we do

The Leukaemia Foundation is the Australian charity stopping blood cancer from wrecking lives.

We exist for every Australian affected by any type of blood cancer, including leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma.

The Leukaemia Foundation offers expert support, funds leading-edge research and campaigns to make change for Australians facing blood cancer.

Our goal is zero lives lost to blood cancer by 2035.

Our values power our purpose and drive us toward our goal: we care deeply, we're bold, and we always step up and make it count for people living with blood cancer.

## Why we do it

Your blood is a remarkable thing. It keeps you alive by giving your body what it needs, taking away what it doesn't and fighting off infection.

Blood cancer stops your blood from doing what it needs to keep you alive and healthy.

It develops in the places of your body where blood is made, but its exact cause is unknown.

Another 53 Australians are diagnosed with blood cancer each day, joining more than 135,000 people living with the devastating impact of our second most diagnosed cancer.

A range of things affect someone's chance of surviving blood cancer and it can be incurable. Sadly, another 16 Australians will lose their life to blood cancer each and every day.

# Frequently asked questions

<b><i>What is the flu?</i></b>	<p>The flu is a highly contagious viral infection that can cause serious infection in people living with blood cancer. With people moving around more freely, we will be more vulnerable to the flu this year.</p>
<b><i>Who is most at risk of the flu and what does vaccination cost?</i></b>	<p>The following people are more at risk of complications from the flu and are eligible for free annual flu vaccinations under the National Immunisation Program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over</li><li>• Children aged 6 months to under 5 years</li><li>• Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy</li><li>• People aged 65 years or over.</li><li>• People aged 6 months or over who have medical conditions that mean they have a higher risk of getting serious disease, including people who are immunocompromised.</li></ul> <p>In 2022, the following states and territories also announced free flu vaccines for the general population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Queensland</b> - until June 30, 2022</li><li>• <b>New South Wales</b> - until June 30, 2022</li><li>• <b>South Australia</b> - until June 30, 2022</li><li>• <b>Western Australia</b> - until June 30, 2022</li><li>• <b>Tasmania</b> - free for anyone aged five and over until June 30, 2022, <b>but only at Community COVID &amp; Flu Vaccination Clinics.</b></li></ul> <p>Under the National Immunisation Program, you may meet the eligible criteria for a free vaccination. Speak with your treatment team or haematologist about what vaccinations you may need and should have, and if you qualify for a free vaccination.</p>
<b><i>When should I get the flu vaccine?</i></b>	<p>Getting vaccinated each year before the peak flu season (typically June to September) is recommended. However, it's never too late to be vaccinated as flu can spread all year round. People with blood cancer are more vulnerable and can experience more serious illness from flu. Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself as it prepares your immune system to fight the flu virus.</p> <p>Annual vaccination is important as flu vaccines change each year to help protect you against the prevailing strain of flu.</p>
<b><i>Where can I get the flu vaccine?</i></b>	<p>You can book a vaccine appointment at a range of health services, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• doctors or general practices</li><li>• local council immunisation clinics (available in some states and territories)</li><li>• community health centres</li><li>• Aboriginal Medical Services and</li><li>• pharmacies.</li></ul> <p><i>Before booking your flu vaccine appointment, make sure you speak with your treatment team or haematologist about what vaccinations you may need and should have.</i></p>

<b><i>I'm not able to receive the flu vaccine, what should I do?</i></b>	If you cannot get the flu vaccination, encourage family and friends you spend time with to get vaccinated. This will avoid them passing the infection on to you, which can put you at higher risk of serious illness if you are immunocompromised.
<b><i>Is the flu vaccine effective if I have a blood cancer or I am immunocompromised?</i></b>	Studies have found patients with a current cancer diagnosis or a compromised immune system respond just as well to the flu vaccine <sup>1</sup> . It's important to know that if you're living with a blood cancer, or are immunocompromised, you may need a second dose of the flu vaccine if recommended by your treatment team or haematologist.
<b><i>How do I know the flu vaccine is safe?</i></b>	All medicines can have side effects, but the flu vaccine is very safe. The chance of having a serious problem from having a vaccine is far lower than the risk of serious harm from catching the flu <sup>2</sup> . The vaccine is reviewed and endorsed annually by Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) which oversees all approvals of vaccines for use in Australia.
<b><i>Can people with cancer get the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine?</i></b>	The COVID-19 vaccines and flu vaccine can be given at the same time, on the same day.
<b><i>Flu Vaccines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People</i></b>	Yearly flu vaccination is recommended and free for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over. <a href="#">More information is available here.</a>

## More information on the flu virus and flu vaccines

More information on viruses (including the flu) and blood cancer is available [here](#)  
[More information on the flu vaccine is available here](#) (Department of Health)

### REFERENCES

1. Ayoola, A., Sukumaran, S., Jain, K., Kumar, R., Gordon, D., Honda-Okubo, Y., Quinn, S., Roy, A., Vatandoust, S., Koczwara, B., Kichenadasse, G., Richards, A., Mead, K., & Karapetis, C. (2020). Efficacy of influenza vaccine (Fluvax) in cancer patients on treatment: a prospective single arm, open-label study. *Supportive Care in Cancer: Official Journal of the Multinational Association of Supportive Care in Cancer*, 28(11), 5411–5417. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-020-05384-2>
2. The flu jab, explained. (2022, May 9). NPS MedicineWise. <https://www.nps.org.au/consumers/the-flu-shot-explained#is-it-safe?>
3. Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), <https://www.tga.gov.au/media-release/2022-seasonal-influenza-vaccines>
4. National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (Influenza vaccine for Australians), <https://ncirs.org.au/>
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Misconceptions about seasonal flu and flu vaccines), <https://www.cdc.gov/>

## More questions? Get in touch

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