



Frequently asked questions about flu (influenza) and flu vaccinations

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1 What is the situation this year?

It is impossible to predict how the 2023/2024 flu season will evolve. In Switzerland, the season generally starts between December and March. Many respiratory diseases occur in clusters during the winter months, and it is possible to be infected by several pathogens at the same time. Although there is currently no clear evidence that SARS-CoV-2 is seasonal in nature, an increased incidence of COVID-19 cases is expected during the winter, and this will place an additional strain on healthcare systems.

Flu vaccination reduces your risk of contracting flu and also your risk of catching several respiratory diseases at the same time. We recommend that people with certain pre-existing conditions and people aged 65 and over have themselves vaccinated against both flu and COVID-19. This will enable these people with a higher risk of complications to avoid severe forms of the diseases, hospitalisation and flu-related complications. This relieves pressure on the health system – especially on intensive care beds in hospitals, but also on healthcare professionals, emergency departments and care homes. The general hygiene and behavioural recommendations will also help reduce the disease burden this winter.

2 Why is it a good idea to get a flu vaccination? (See also question 15)

Flu isn't always harmless. Particularly in people at increased risk, it can lead to serious complications requiring hospitalisation, and sometimes even death. Many of these severe cases can be prevented with vaccination. The flu vaccination is the simplest preventive measure against flu complications. It is safe and well tolerated. The current hygiene and social distancing recommendations are also important preventive measures. They complement the vaccination but are no substitute for it. The flu vaccination provides protection against flu (influenza) but not against COVID-19 or other colds and viruses that are common in the winter months.

3 Who should get a flu vaccination?

The 2023 recommendations are largely the same as in previous years.

- The FCV and FOPH recommend flu vaccination for **people who are more likely to experience complications if they catch the disease**. These are:
 - Anyone aged 65 or over;
 - People aged six months and over with certain chronic conditions or low immunity;
 - Pregnant women;
 - Children aged six months and over who were born prematurely (for the first two winters after birth).
- Vaccinating **close contacts** also protects people in the vulnerable group. Vaccination is therefore recommended for:
 - people who – in a professional or private capacity – have close and regular contact with the people described above with a higher risk of complications;

- people who – in a professional or private capacity – have close and regular contact with infants aged under six months. Infants also have a higher risk of complications and cannot yet be vaccinated.

Close contacts include, for example, adults and children aged six months and over who live in the same household as people in vulnerable groups, plus people who have contact with especially vulnerable people in the course of their work. These include, for example, healthcare workers and those working in the paramedical field plus employees of crèches, day care centres, care homes, facilities for people with disabilities, and personal assistants.

- **New:** Vaccination is also recommended for people who have **regular contact with poultry or wild birds**. This is intended to prevent a person from contracting an avian flu virus and a human flu virus at the same time.

4 Which children should have the vaccination?

The FCV and FOPH recommend flu vaccination for children aged six months and over who are in the vulnerable group (see also question 3). For these children, the vaccination is covered by compulsory health insurance.

Children aged six months and over who have close and regular contact with people with a higher risk of complications should also be vaccinated. Such people include, for example, pregnant women, family members with chronic conditions, or grandparents. In these cases, the fact that the children are protected by the vaccine also means people around them are protected.

5 When should you get vaccinated?

The flu vaccination period runs from mid-October until the beginning of the flu season. The flu season is difficult to predict accurately, but generally starts in Switzerland between December and March, and most commonly in January.

Even people who are vaccinated in November or early December have enough time for their body's immune system to build immune protection.

You can have a flu vaccination with, before or after a COVID-19 vaccination.

This year's National Flu Vaccination Day will be Friday 10 November. For a recommended flat charge, anyone interested can get vaccinated against seasonal flu on that day at one of the participating medical practices or pharmacies offering vaccinations.

6 Which flu vaccines are available for which age groups?

A table with an overview of the products authorised and available in Switzerland (in German, French and Italian) can be found on the website www.protectionagainstflu.ch/en-us/vaccination/what-vaccine-made.html.

7 How many vaccine doses are available this year?

The federal government expects demand for flu vaccines in 2023 to be similar to demand in 2022. According to the flu vaccine manufacturers, between 1.3 and 1.4 million doses are available this autumn.

By way of comparison, in pre-pandemic years there were between 1.0 and 1.3 million doses, while at the height of the pandemic in 2020 there were about 1.9 million due to a sharp increase in demand. Just under 1.4 million doses were available in 2022.

8 How does Switzerland procure flu vaccines?

With the exception of pandemic vaccines and novel vaccines for outbreaks of diseases such as COVID-19 or Mpox, the vaccine market in Switzerland is subject to the market economy and is dictated by supply and demand. Vaccination locations such as medical practices and pharmacies buy their vaccines on the private market. The federal government does not purchase or procure any non-pandemic vaccines, including any vaccines against seasonal flu.

9 Should you get vaccinated against seasonal flu and COVID-19 at the same time?

The flu vaccination can in principle be administered with, before or after a COVID-19 vaccination. If they are given together, one injection is administered in the left upper arm and the other in the right. Having both vaccinations at once means there is no need for a second appointment. However, any adverse vaccination reactions after simultaneous vaccine administration will occur together, including pain in both upper arms.

10 Does vaccination give people at especially high risk adequate protection against seasonal flu?

The more people in high-risk groups who have the vaccination the better. However, the efficacy of the vaccination is often somewhat reduced for people with a higher risk of complications compared with healthy, younger people. The flu vaccination is therefore also recommended for those who in the course of their work or in non-work settings have regular close contact with people in vulnerable groups.

The high-dose vaccine Efluelda® has been authorised for and available to the elderly since 2022. This can further improve efficacy.

The [hygiene and behavioural recommendations](#) complement vaccination by playing an important role in protecting people who are at greater risk of complications if they catch flu.

11 Who pays for flu vaccinations?

For people at a greater risk of complications as per the FOPH vaccination recommendations, flu vaccination with the standard-dose vaccines (Vaxigrip Tetra®, Fluarix Tetra®) administered at a medical practice or vaccination centre will be paid by their compulsory health insurance, provided they have already used up their annual deductible.

For the high-dose flu vaccine Efluelda®, this arrangement applies to everyone aged 75 or over and also to people aged 65 or over if they have an additional risk factor for complications.

If the vaccination is administered in a pharmacy, the cost of the vaccine will be covered provided that there is a medical prescription. The costs of administering the vaccine must be borne by the person being vaccinated.

Other people wishing to be vaccinated must pay for the vaccination themselves. Many employers offer the vaccination to their employees free of charge.

12 Are there plans for a flu campaign?

This year's flu prevention information is similar to previous years: we provide plenty of information and materials for members of the public and health professionals on www.protectionagainstflu.ch.

This year's National Flu Vaccination Day is Friday 10 November. On that day, for a recommended flat charge, you can get vaccinated against flu, even without an appointment, at one of the participating medical surgeries or pharmacies offering vaccination.

There will also be an additional specific campaign targeting people aged 65 and over and people with pre-existing conditions for whom vaccination is recommended to prevent severe forms of the disease. Campaign posters are available to download.

For the hygiene and behavioural recommendations, a combined flu and COVID-19 poster is available to download.

13 What should I do if I have flu-like symptoms?

The symptoms of COVID-19 or another respiratory disease may be similar to those of flu.

If you experience cold or flu symptoms, keep away from others as best possible and wear a mask. Or even better: stay at home. This way you prevent the disease from spreading further.

Make sure you drink plenty of fluids and rest. Medicines for pain and fever can relieve the symptoms; ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

The symptoms of COVID-19 may be similar to those of flu.

People aged 65 or over, pregnant women and people with a chronic illness should keep a close eye on their symptoms and contact their doctor immediately if they have any problems.

14 Why aren't people tested for flu?

As opposed to COVID-19, there are virtually no reasons or opportunities to be tested for influenza viruses in suspected cases of flu. Seasonal flu is endemic. The situation cannot be compared to the COVID-19 pandemic, when a new virus caused a considerable number of severe cases and deaths and threatened to overload the healthcare system. However, under certain circumstances (e.g. if the influenza has become severe or in the context of hospitalisation), the doctor may order a flu test.

15 The flu vaccine is not 100% effective. Why does it still make sense to get vaccinated? (See also question 2)

Depending on the flu season and population group, the flu vaccine is between 20% and 80% effective against infection or a mild case of the flu.

The flu vaccination provides much better protection against potential serious complications of influenza. Especially in people with an increased risk of complications, influenza sometimes leads to severe complications that can be due to the flu virus itself or to a secondary bacterial infection. Particularly in the upcoming winter, when we'll be seeing COVID-19 and flu circulating at the same time, the flu vaccination will help to reduce the overall burden of disease.

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For more information on flu, including the flu vaccination test, see:
www.protectionagainstflu.ch