

## Don't underestimate the flu - get your shot!

As the cooler months arrive, so does the familiar threat of influenza, or the flu. For many of us, flu symptoms like fever, cough, sore throat and fatigue might seem like a temporary nuisance, resolving within a few days. And while this is true for most people, it's crucial to remember that the flu can be far more serious for others.

Influenza is not just a bad cold; it can lead to severe illness, hospitalisation and even death. Certain groups within our campus community face a higher risk of these serious complications. It's vital that we all do our part to protect them.

Who is most at risk?

- **Pregnant women:** Flu can increase the risk of complications during pregnancy.
- **People living with HIV:** Their immune systems may be more vulnerable to severe illness.
- **Individuals with chronic conditions:** This includes conditions like diabetes, lung disease, heart disease, tuberculosis, kidney disease, or obesity, which can be exacerbated by the flu.
- **Older adults (65 years and older):** Their immune systems naturally weaken with age.
- **Children younger than two years:** Their immune systems are still developing.

The best way to protect yourself and others is to get your annual flu shot. Vaccination is a safe and effective way to significantly reduce your risk of contracting the flu and spreading it to those who are more vulnerable.

Campus Health Service strongly encourages all students, faculty and staff to get their flu vaccine as soon as possible. Let's work together to keep our campus healthy and safe this flu season. Information on where and when you can get your flu shot will be shared shortly. Protect yourself, protect our community.

## Frequently Asked Questions

*What is influenza (flu)?*

Seasonal influenza (the flu) is an acute respiratory infection caused by influenza viruses. It is common in all parts of the world. (World Health Organization)

*Why should I vaccinate?*

It can reduce flu illnesses, visits to doctor's offices and missed work and school due to flu, as well as make symptoms less severe and reduce flu-related hospitalisations and deaths in people who get vaccinated but still get sick.

*When should I get vaccinated?*

At the start of the influenza season, which in South Africa was 25 March 2025. Although the vaccine is most effective when given before the season starts, it is not too late to get vaccinated. Protection develops about two weeks after vaccination, and annual vaccination is needed as flu viruses change over time and protection does not last from one year to the next.

### *Does the flu vaccine work right away?*

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### *Do I need a flu shot every year?*

Yes, flu viruses change over time and protection does not last from one year to the next.

### *Will the vaccine give me flu?*

No, the flu vaccine cannot give you the flu. The vaccine either contains inactivated (killed) flu viruses or proteins from the virus, which are not capable of causing illness. While you might experience some mild side effects like soreness or a headache after the shot, these are usually temporary and indicate your body is building immunity.

### *Is the vaccine safe?*

Yes, the quadrivalent (four-strain) flu vaccine is generally considered safe and effective. It is made with inactivated viruses, so it cannot cause the flu. While some people may experience mild side effects like soreness or fever, serious reactions are rare.

For more specific information, it's always best to consult with your doctor or other healthcare provider. They can provide personalised advice and address any concerns you may have about the flu vaccine.

### *Who should get a flu vaccine?*

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### *Who should not have the flu vaccine?*

- Children younger than six months of age
- People with severe, life-threatening allergies to any ingredient in a flu vaccine (other than egg proteins).

### *Where can I get vaccinated?*

CHS will be hosting various flu vaccine campaigns in and around campus.

For more information on exact schedules, email the clinic at [chs@sun.ac.za](mailto:chs@sun.ac.za) or [vsouthon@sun.ac.za](mailto:vsouthon@sun.ac.za). Also keep an eye on the weekly newsletters for this information.

The vaccine cost is R100 and can be covered by your medical aid or on invoice from CHS. All staff members using Health4Me can receive their flu vaccines at pharmacies.

All staff/students who are members of Discovery Health:

Discovery Health pays for one seasonal flu vaccine a year for members who are at a high risk of getting severe flu illness:

- If you are considered a high risk, the **Screening and Prevention Benefit** will cover your flu shot every year.
- If you are not considered to be at high risk, your flu shot is covered by your available day-to-day benefits, if applicable.