



INFLUENZA VACCINES AND THE UPCOMING FLU SEASON



When to get vaccinated?

The influenza season in South Africa occurs mainly during the winter months of May to August. It is recommended that individuals get vaccinated before the flu season, i.e. from March (or as soon as the vaccines are locally available).



Flu vaccines currently available in the private sector which may be covered by your medical scheme:

Only the QIV flu vaccines will be available in South Africa for the 2023 flu season:

Please remember to check with your medical scheme regarding benefits available for the flu vaccine if you are unsure.



Other ways to prevent the spread of flu.

- Keep your hands clean by washing them regularly with soap and water or by using an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Cover your mouth and nose, when coughing and sneezing.
- If feeling unwell, self-isolation is crucial to prevent the transmission of the flu virus.
- Close contact with sick individuals should be avoided, if possible.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work, or school, especially when someone is ill.
- To reduce the risk of infection, avoid touching the eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Consider wearing a face mask when in public spaces.



What are flu vaccines and how do they work?

Flu vaccines are designed to protect against the most common strains of flu viruses that are expected to circulate in a particular year. The World Health Organisation (**WHO**) outlines recommendations as to which strains should be included in the flu vaccines for the flu season and hemisphere in question.

There are two types of flu vaccine: **trivalent influenza vaccine (TIV)** which contains three strains of the flu virus (**two A subtypes and one B subtype**) and **quadrivalent influenza vaccine (QIV)** containing four strains of the flu virus (**two A subtypes and two B subtypes**). Both vaccines are equally recommended by WHO for the 2023 flu season.



Where to get vaccinated?

The flu vaccine can be obtained at numerous healthcare facilities. It is advisable to call beforehand to enquire about the availability of the vaccine and schedule an appointment in order to minimise waiting time and to avoid disappointment.

References

1. Mayo Clinic (2021). Influenza (flu) - Symptoms and Causes. [online] Mayo Clinic. Available at: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/flu/symptoms-causes/syc-20351719>.
2. Influenza NICD recommendations for the diagnosis, management, prevention and public health response, April 2022.