

# 10 tips for flu and Covid-19 vaccines

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The seasons are changing and with winter on its way, which heralds the start of the 'flu season'. We chat to Dr Morgan Mkhathswa, head of operations at Bonitas Medical Fund on why a flu vaccine is recommended, not just by the Scheme but also the World Health Organization (WHO).



Dr Morgan Mkhathswa - Bonitas Medical Fund

## *1. Why should I get a flu vaccine?*

Although the flu vaccine will not eliminate your risk of developing flu, it helps reduce your chances of severe infection. Annually, seasonal influenza (flu) kills around 11 500 people in South Africa which is why it is a good precautionary measure to take.

## *2. How are Covid-19 and flu viruses similar?*

WHO says that Covid-19 and influenza viruses are similar in disease presentation. 'Firstly, they both cause respiratory disease, which presents a wide range of illness from asymptomatic or mild through to severe disease and death.

'Secondly, both viruses are transmitted by contact, droplets and any material that can carry infection. As a result, the same public health measures such as hand hygiene and social distancing is recommended.'

## *3. What are the essential differences between Covid-19 and flu?*

Flu is an acute viral respiratory infection, transmitted by the influenza virus. There are three types of influenza, namely Influenza A, B and C. Covid-19 and influenza are essentially different viruses with SARS-CoV-2 being a newly discovered coronavirus that causes Covid-19.

## *4. Why do I need a flu shot every year?*

The flu virus changes every year, this means last year's vaccine will not keep you safe this year. The vaccine helps your immune system fight off the virus by producing antibodies – the soldiers in your body that battle the flu virus.

## *5. What vaccines have been developed for 2022?*

The flu vaccines available for this year are: The Vaxigrip Tetra, Influvac and Influvac Tetra.

## *6. Can I get the flu vaccine and a Covid-19 vaccine together?*

As per the National Covid-19 Vaccination Programme Circular 3 of 2022, the answer is yes. However, it is recommended that if you decide to have both vaccines at the same time, then one should be on the left arm and one on the right.

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

It is recommended that anyone in the High-risk groups including:

- Healthcare workers
- Individuals over 65 years of age
- Individuals with chronic diseases – or comorbidities – for example: Cardiac disease, hypertension, stroke, diabetes, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, kidney diseases, etc.
- Pregnant women
- People living with HIV/AIDS

#### 8. Who should NOT have the flu vaccine?

- Individuals who are allergic to eggs or egg proteins as the manufacturing process for the vaccine involves the use of chicken eggs
- Infants under 6 months of age - the vaccines are not licensed for use in such young children
- Individuals who may have had a severe reaction to a flu vaccine in the past – if you are unsure discuss with your healthcare provider
- Individuals who may be suffering from flu symptoms already

#### 9. Will the flu shot give me a mild flu?

According to the Centre for Disease Control (CDC), 'A flu shot cannot cause flu. Flu vaccines are currently made either with flu vaccine viruses that have been 'inactivated' and are not infectious or with no flu vaccine viruses at all. The most common side-effects from the vaccine are soreness, redness, tenderness or swelling where the shot was given. Serious allergic reactions to flu vaccines are very rare.'

#### 10. Still not convinced?

Flu viruses spread very quickly from person to person. Even if the flu vaccine is not 100% effective against the current flu strain, it will reduce your risk of getting flu and, if you do get it, it will be a great deal milder.

More importantly, by having the flu vaccine you protect others, who may be vulnerable family members, small babies, the elderly or those who are immune compromised. As with Covid-19, the more people vaccinated the closer we can get to 'herd immunity'.

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