



**Australian Government**

**Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare**

# Influenza in Australia

## Quick facts

Annual vaccination is the best way to prevent severe infections, hospitalisation and death due to influenza.

Influenza vaccination is free for people who are at higher risk of becoming severely unwell with influenza.

## What is influenza?

Influenza is a contagious respiratory disease that causes seasonal epidemics in Australia. Influenza spreads person to person through droplets made when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.

Influenza symptoms include fever and chills, cough, tiredness, sore throat and joint and muscle pain. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea is possible, especially in children. In severe infections, symptoms get quickly worse and complications can arise.

Anyone can be infected with influenza, but some people such as adults aged over 65 years, pregnant women and Indigenous Australians have a higher chance of serious illness and complications, such as pneumonia. Some people with influenza die as a result of their infection.

## Vaccination against influenza

Since 2010, the Australian National Immunisation Program (NIP) has provided annual influenza vaccination for: all people aged 65 years and over; all Indigenous Australians aged 6 months to 5 years or 15 years and over; pregnant women; and people aged over 6 months with medical conditions which increase their risk of severe illness (examples include congestive heart failure or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).

Annual vaccination against influenza is recommended for anyone aged over 6 months who wishes to reduce their risk of catching influenza. Vaccination is recommended for those who have frequent contact with people eligible for vaccination under the NIP.

The effectiveness of the vaccine changes from year to year, but people who are vaccinated have a decreased chance of severe illness, hospitalisation and death.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Australians vaccinated against influenza because vaccinations can also be purchased by work places or individuals, in addition to programs funded by governments.

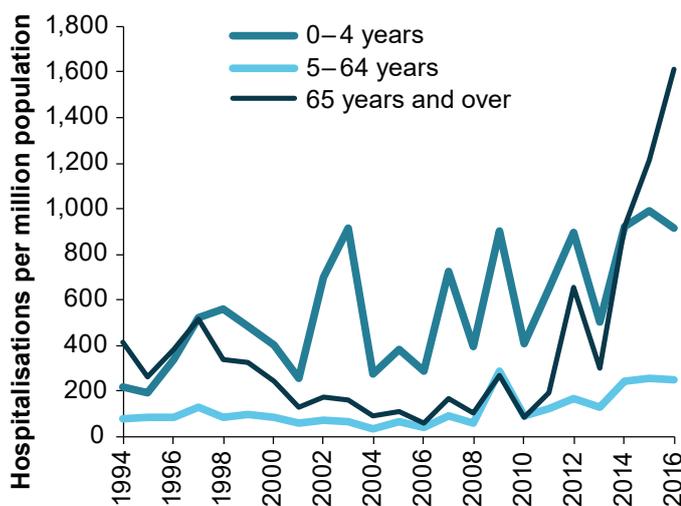
## Influenza notifications

Influenza is a notifiable disease in Australia. The number of influenza notifications in Australia varies widely from year to year, for example there were around 90,800 notifications of influenza in 2016, and over a quarter of a million notifications in 2017 (around 3,800 and 10,200 notifications per million population, respectively). Notification rates can be affected by factors such as the amount of testing of unwell people or the types of tests used. Therefore, other approaches are used to help monitor influenza activity and interpret notification data, such as the number of GP visits and hospital admissions.

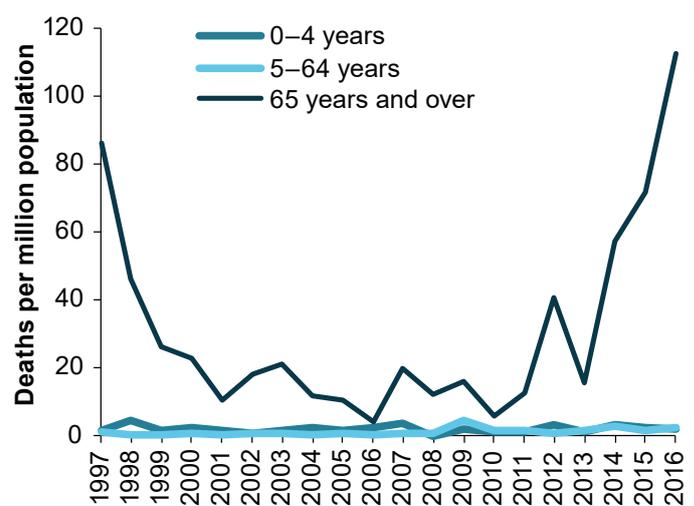
## Hospitalisations and deaths due to influenza

In 2016, there were over 12,000 hospital admissions for influenza in Australia. The number of hospital visits rises and falls each year depending on the characteristics of the particular influenza season. Hospitalisation rates are generally highest among children aged under 5 and adults 65 and over (left figure).

Between 1997 and 2016, influenza caused 2,316 deaths in Australia, 80% (1,847 deaths) of which were in people aged 65 and over. Over this period, there was an average of 31 influenza deaths per million population per year in older Australians, compared with 2 per million population per year in children aged under 5 (right figure). These data may under-estimate the real impact of influenza on deaths in Australia, as many of the people who die will not have been tested for influenza.



Source: AIHW analysis of National Hospital Morbidity Database.



Source: AIHW analysis of National Mortality Database.

This fact sheet is part of the [Vaccine-preventable diseases](#) release. For more information see [Immunisation](#) on the AIHW website.

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