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More free flu vaccines and a second COVID-19 booster to groups at risk of hospitalisation

HON ANDREW LITTLE(/MINISTER/HON-ANDREW-LITTLE)

Health (/portfolio/labour-2020-2023/health)

- The Government has widened access to free flu vaccines with an extra 800,000 New Zealanders eligible from this Friday, July 1
- Children aged 3-12 years and people with serious mental health or addiction needs now eligible for free flu dose.
- From tomorrow (Tuesday), second COVID-19 booster available six months after the first booster for older New Zealanders and other groups.

The Government is ramping up access to free flu vaccines and COVID-19 booster shots for those groups of people who are being admitted in increasing numbers to hospital, Health Minister Andrew Little announced today.

“We’re making free flu shots available to another 800,000 New Zealanders, including children, more of whom are having to go to hospital,” Andrew Little said.

“Free flu shots are already available for everyone over the age of 65 and those at risk of becoming seriously ill or who have underlying conditions.

s season we ordered 40 per cent more vaccines. We’ve already seen more than one million New Zealanders get a flu shot, but with significant pressure on our health system we’re ramping up efforts to get as many people vaccinated as possible.

“In recent weeks we have seen a number of pre-school children hospitalised with the flu. We also know children can be transmitters of the flu to others in their family who are more at risk, so it makes sense to reduce transmission as much as we can.

“We also know that people with serious mental health or addiction needs can get seriously sick from the flu, which is why we’re also extending flu vaccinations to this group this year.

“The extension of the free flu vaccination to more at-risk New Zealanders is just one of the actions we are taking to reduce pressure on our health system this winter,” Andrew Little said.

COVID-19 Response Minister Dr Ayesha Verrall said a second COVID-19 booster was available for everyone over the age of 50 and recommended for anyone over the age of 65, as well as Māori and Pacific peoples older than 50 and people who are severely immunocompromised.

“The availability of the second booster has also been extended to health, aged-care and disability workers over the age of 30,” Dr Verrall said.

“For those not at risk of severe illness from COVID-19, a two-dose primary course and one booster continues to provide very good protection. So, for those who haven’t had a first booster, please act now.”

The second booster dose should be offered six months after the previous dose, and postponed for three months after a COVID-19 infection.

A second booster dose is not recommended for anyone who is pregnant and is healthy, including those with no underlying health conditions which could increase the risk of severe COVID-19.

"Staying up-to-date with the recommended COVID-19 vaccinations will continue to protect you from the risk of serious illness, hospitalisation or death," Dr Verrall said.

"The Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group will continue to review new information on COVID-19 and vaccines and will make further recommendations on eligibility criteria as necessary.

"The combination of Omicron and flu is making this winter more challenging than normal. The best thing New Zealanders can do to ensure they and their families don't end up in hospital is to be up-to-date with their flu and COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters," Dr Verrall said.

Anyone who is eligible for a second booster can get one without a prescription from a range of places, including walk-in and drive-through vaccination centres, booking online using BookMyVaccine (https://bookmyvaccine.covid19.health.nz/?_ga=2.5612404.612450699.1655880389-1191391970.1655168988) or by calling the COVID Vaccination Healthline on 0800 282926. Flu shots are available by booking with GPs or local pharmacies.

Notes for Editors

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- As well as the expanded criteria for funded flu vaccinations announced today, flu vaccinations are also free for people aged 65 and over, Māori and Pacific people aged 55 and over, anyone who is pregnant and people with underlying health issues like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease.
- A record two million doses of flu vaccine are available this year, and so far just over a million people have been vaccinated.
- The widened eligibility criteria means more than 800,000 more people can now get free vaccinations – about 655,000 children and 170,000 people with serious mental health and addiction needs.
- Funding for three to 12-year-olds is for the 2022 flu season, while funding for people with serious mental health or addiction issues will be ongoing for future flu seasons.
- Those with schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder or anyone currently accessing secondary or tertiary mental health and addiction services, will now be eligible for 2022 and future seasons.
- Walk-in vaccination options can be found via www.health.govt.nz/flu (http://www.health.govt.nz/flu) and can get a flu jab from your doctor or usual healthcare provider, and at most pharmacies.

COVID-19 Second Booster

The second COVID-19 booster is available for everyone 50 years and older, and health, aged-care and disability-care workers over the age 30 once six months has passed since a previous dose.

The second dose is recommended six months since their previous for:

- People aged 65 years and over.
- Māori and Pacific peoples aged 50 years and over.
- Residents of aged-care and disability-care facilities.
- Severely immunocompromised people who received a three-dose primary course and a fourth dose as a first booster (noting this would be a fifth dose for these people).
- People aged 16 years and over who have a medical condition that increases the risk of severe breakthrough COVID-19 illness.
- Disabled people aged 16 years and over with significant or complex health needs or multiple comorbidities that increase the risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19.
- COVID-19 vaccinations, including the second booster, can be booked through Book My Vaccine (https://bookmyvaccine.covid19.health.nz/) or by calling the COVID Vaccination Healthline on 0800 28 29 26 (8am to 8pm, 7 days a week).
- Walk-in vaccination options can be found via Healthpoint (https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19-vaccination/) and the Unite Against Covid website (https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/get-your-covid-19-vaccination/#walk-in).
- If you have COVID-19 recently you should delay your next scheduled COVID-19 vaccination for three months, however there is no need to defer your flu vaccination.