

## MEDSHIELD MEDICAL SCHEME

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**MEDSHIELD**  
medical scheme

## CONSUMER ARTICLE FOR MEDIA USE

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#### Protect your circle: Get your flu vaccination now!

We've all been there: one co-worker arrives feeling fine on Monday, has the sniffles by Tuesday, and by Wednesday has a fever. By Thursday, more co-workers show symptoms, and suddenly the office feels like a flu incubator.

There are a few co-workers who showed mild to no symptoms, and you even hear some of them say, "Oh, I never get sick in winter," and "The flu vaccine? It never works for me".

The truth is that everyone can get the flu. How your immune system reacts will determine how you feel and how severe your symptoms are. Depending on the flu strain and your immune system's strength, you could show some or no symptoms.

Getting the flu shot is not just about avoiding a few days of discomfort. It's about protecting your body, preserving your time and energy, and keeping your community safe. It's a proactive step towards a healthier winter, and it could make all the difference.

#### Be a barrier, not a carrier

According to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) flu cases are already rising, making it essential to act before infections peak.

Unlike a common cold, influenza is a highly contagious virus that can cause high fever, body aches, extreme fatigue, and respiratory distress. In severe cases, it can lead to hospitalisation or even death – particularly in individuals with compromised immune systems or pre-existing conditions.

Most people don't realise they are contagious a day or two before they feel any flu symptoms, which means they can unknowingly infect friends, family, or co-workers. By the time you start feeling ill, you've likely already shared the virus with the people around you. Often, asymptomatic people or those who dismiss symptoms as a "common cold" are spreading the virus unknowingly in high-contact environments such as:

- Office-based workers sharing air-conditioned spaces.
- Families living together with children who attend school or university.
- Healthcare workers who are in direct contact with patients.
- Public transport commuters.
- Shopping malls during peak shopping hours.

The flu shot helps your body build antibodies that protect against the most common strains predicted for the year. It takes about two weeks for your body to develop this immunity.

The flu vaccine is vital for **people who are severely vulnerable to illness**, including:

- Pregnant women.
- Older adults (65+).
- Children under five.
- Individuals with chronic health conditions (including HIV, diabetes, TB, asthma and heart disease).
- Healthcare workers and caregivers.
- People living in crowded environments or with limited access to healthcare.

Even if you're young and healthy, getting vaccinated is still vital. Flu viruses spread easily, and many people are contagious before showing symptoms. By getting your flu shot, you protect those around you without even realising it.

Getting vaccinated is a personal health decision, but its impact extends beyond the individual.

### **The flu is more serious than you think**

Most people experience the flu as a common cold or even seasonal allergies. Self-diagnosis poses a risk for both healthy and immunocompromised individuals. In extreme cases, and if left untreated, the flu can lead to:

- Pneumonia.
- Hospitalisation, particularly in older adults and young children.
- Cardiac events triggered by respiratory illness.
- Worsening of existing conditions like asthma, diabetes and heart disease.

### **The flu vaccine: Tried, tested, and it works to protect you and your family**

Getting the flu vaccine reduces your risk of getting and spreading the flu. It is reformulated every year to protect you from new strains circulating during colder months. That's why last year's vaccine won't keep you protected.

#### **What you need to know:**

- It is recommended that you get the flu vaccine in April and May in South Africa to help your immune system prepare for the colder months of June, July, and August.
- The flu vaccine takes about two weeks to become effective.
- The flu vaccine contains an inactive form of the virus strain that is most prevalent that year.
- It is normal to experience flu-like symptoms after vaccination. The flu vaccine is an inactive form of the virus that cannot make you sick. It triggers an immune response that helps your immune system build immunity against the flu.
- If you have any allergies or if you have had an allergic reaction to the flu vaccine, it is recommended that you speak to a healthcare provider before getting the vaccine.

#### **How to get the flu vaccine**

It is important to know that at any given time of the year, we are exposed to multiple strains of the flu virus. That is why the vaccine is reformulated every year using an inactive form of the most prevalent flu strain circulating.

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You can get your flu vaccine from your GP, a clinic, or selected pharmacies.

- Book an appointment with your GP:  
Most medical aids, including Medshield, covers the cost of the flu vaccine. Refer to your benefit plan to confirm whether your consultation and the flu vaccine is covered.
- Book your vaccine at your company's Wellness Day:  
Companies can organise employee wellness days in partnership with medical aids. For example, Medshield Medical Scheme facilitates Wellness Days with different employer groups, where employees can book to get their flu vaccine at the employer's wellness day.
- Book an appointment with a clinic nurse at selected pharmacies:  
Scheduling a nurse appointment at your local pharmacy is an easy way to get your flu vaccine. Contact your pharmacy to find out more and schedule an appointment.
- High-risk individuals can get vaccinated for free:  
The National Department of Health provides free flu vaccines to healthcare workers, children, individuals 65 and older, individuals with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic lung disease, immunosuppressive conditions, and pregnant women.

Get vaccinated annually and encourage loved ones, especially the elderly, young children and pregnant women, to do the same. The best way to protect your health and others isn't stocking up on Vitamin C; it's getting vaccinated and encouraging loved ones to do the same.

This winter, take action: get vaccinated and inspire others to do the same.

## **FIN**

(988 words)

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

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