



Influenza

The disease

Influenza A and B are the two strains of influenza viruses responsible for causing human upper respiratory disease. Classic symptoms of influenza include fever, lethargy, muscle aches and pains and a cough. Antibiotics are ineffective against the virus causing the infection.

Where is it found?

Epidemics of influenza occur during the winter and spring months in most years. Influenza virus infections cause disease in all age groups. Rates of infection are highest among children, but rates of serious illness and death are highest among the elderly and persons of any age who have medical conditions that place them at high risk for complications. Influenza viruses also can cause global epidemics of disease, or pandemics, during which rates of severe illness and death from influenza-related complications can increase dramatically.

Risk to travellers

The risk for exposure to influenza during travel to foreign countries varies depending on the time of year and destination. In the tropics, influenza can occur throughout the year. In the southern hemisphere, most activity occurs from April through September. In the northern hemisphere peak activity occurs from November through March. Recommendations for travellers to countries experiencing avian influenza outbreaks can be found at smartraveller.gov.au

In recent years, influenza strains originating in birds have sickened humans in various parts of the globe including China, Indonesia and Egypt. Fortunately, transmission of the viruses between humans has been rare to date; however the possibility of a mutation of the viruses allowing for further spread remains. Travellers to areas affected by avian influenza outbreaks are advised to: avoid animal markets, don't touch animals/birds, eat only well-cooked chicken & eggs and practice good personal hygiene.

Travelvax recommends vaccination for the following travellers:

- over 65 years of age.
- those with chronic heart or lung conditions.
- travel in large tourist groups (particularly trains, buses, cruise ships).
- business travellers who wish to avoid lost time.

NB - Vaccination is recommended every 12 months. If travelling to a different hemisphere, the types or strains of flu virus circulating may differ from the hemisphere from which you have travelled. If you have been vaccinated recently against influenza, it is advisable to check if the strain of the virus at your destination is covered by the vaccine you have received.



Vaccination

Type:

- Inactivated virus vaccine protecting against 3 (trivalent) or 4 (quadrivalent) influenza strains.

Standard Schedule:

- Single dose each year
- For infants & children aged 6 months to 10 years who have never had the vaccine before: 2 doses at least 4 weeks apart.

Contraindications: Should not be administered to individuals who have previously experienced a serious reaction to this vaccine or who are known to be hypersensitive to any of the vaccine components.

Level of protection:

- 6 to 9 months protection against main influenza viruses each season. (Will not protect against the common cold viruses.)

Possible side effects:

- Usually infrequent and mild:
- Soreness at the injection site.
- 15- 20% may experience fever, lethargy and muscle aches.

NB: contrary to popular myth, the influenza vaccine cannot cause influenza.

As with all vaccines, there is a small risk of allergic reaction.

More information on Influenza is available during your pre-travel consultation with Travelvax. Call 1300 360 164 for the location of the clinic nearest to you.