



Flu vaccine plans: knowledge gaps and needle phobia

Poll report

Poll 37, May 2025



Report highlights

- Only 61% of children are likely to be vaccinated against the flu this season, according to parents.
- 36% of parents don't know healthy children can get seriously unwell with the flu.
- Among parents not intending to vaccinate their child against the flu, almost three in four (71%) are not aware the flu vaccine is recommended every year.
- Most parents who plan to have their child vaccinated against flu would prefer the vaccine was available at school (84%).
- One in four children aged four years or more (27%) has an intense fear of needles and 13% have a phobia severe enough to stop them getting the flu vaccine.

Who can get the flu vaccine?

The seasonal influenza (flu) vaccine is recommended annually for all babies and children from six months of age. In Australia, it is provided free of charge to all children aged six months to under five years. The 2025 seasonal flu vaccine became available for children in Australia in April this year.



Do parents plan to vaccinate their children against the flu in 2025?

According to parents surveyed in April 2025, three in five children aged six months and older (61%) are likely to be vaccinated against the flu in 2025. This includes 17% of children who had already been vaccinated at the time of the survey, and 44% for whom parents plan to vaccinate later in the year (see Figure 1). Two in five parents (39%) are hesitant about flu vaccination, with 17% saying they would not vaccinate their child and 22% unsure about their vaccination plans (see Figure 1).

Parents report they are slightly more likely to plan on vaccinating younger children: 66% of children aged six months to under five years, 60% of those aged five to 11 years, and 58% of those aged 12 to 17 years.

Parents reported that 61% of children had received a flu vaccine at least once prior to 2025. Parents indicate that the majority (80%) of these will be vaccinated again in 2025. Among children who have never received a flu vaccine, one in three (29%) will be vaccinated this year according to parents.

Vaccination intention varies across demographic groups. Parents with three or more children were less likely to report an intention to vaccinate (48%) compared to those with only one child (66%). Similarly, parents without a regular general practitioner (GP) were less likely to vaccinate (45%) than those who had a regular GP (65%). Parents with lower levels of education (Certificate I to IV or Year 12 only) were also less likely to vaccinate (54% and 61% respectively) than those with a university degree (66%). There was no difference in vaccination intention between parents living in regional and metropolitan areas (62%), and only a small difference between parents born in Australia (64%) and those born overseas (59%).

Flu vaccine: Parent knowledge and concerns

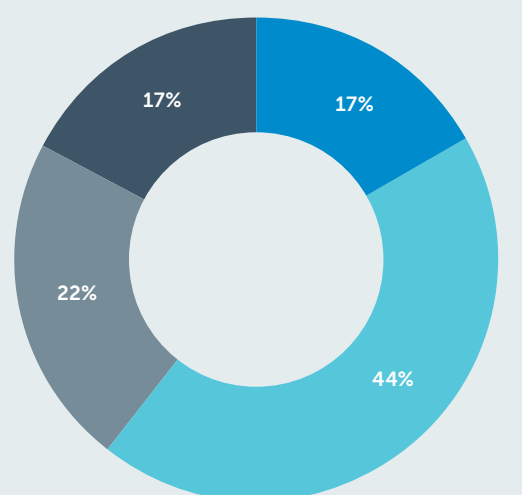
Parents hold a range of beliefs and concerns about the flu vaccine, with notable differences in knowledge and attitudes between those who intend to vaccinate their child and those who are 'hesitant' (either unsure or not planning to vaccinate).

Flu, flu vaccine recommendations and efficacy

Overall, more than one third of parents (36%) are unaware that healthy children can become seriously unwell from the flu. The lack of awareness about healthy children becoming seriously unwell is more common among those hesitant to vaccinate their child (47%) than those who plan on vaccinating (29%).

There are clear differences among parents in understanding flu vaccine recommendations. A large majority (71%) of hesitant parents said it is not necessary for children to get the flu vaccine every year, compared to 31% of parents who intend to vaccinate. Similarly, nearly half of hesitant parents (47%) believe the flu vaccine is not needed this year because they expect less flu to circulate – double the proportion of parents intending to vaccinate (24%).

Flu vaccine 2025: parents' plans for their child



- Child has had 2025 flu vaccine
- Parent plans to vaccinate against flu in 2025
- Parent unsure about vaccinating against flu in 2025
- Parent not planning to vaccinate against flu in 2025

Percentage of children (n = 3,201)

Note: All proportions are weighted by parents' age, sex, number of children, SES, Indigenous status and state

Figure 1.

Two in three parents (68%) not intending to vaccinate their child believe the flu vaccine may not work well enough to be worth having, compared to one in three intending parents (34%).

Safety and side effects

Hesitant parents are considerably more likely to have concerns about flu vaccination, with two in three (69%) saying they are worried about side effects, compared with less than half (41%) of parents who intend to vaccinate. More than half of hesitant parents (54%) believe children receive too many vaccines, compared to one in four (25%) parents who plan to vaccinate.

Flu vaccine: Sources of support, trust and information

Family, friends and trust in health professionals

Half of parents who are hesitant to vaccinate (52%) report their friends and family do not support flu vaccination, compared to just 17% of intending parents. Hesitant parents are also three times more likely to say they do not trust information from their child's doctor or nurse, with 39% expressing this concern, compared to only 13% of parents who plan to vaccinate.

Trustworthy information

Twice as many parents who are hesitant about vaccinating their child against the flu say they do not know where to find trustworthy information about flu vaccines online (41% versus 21%).

Flu vaccine: Practical considerations and access

There were few differences observed between hesitant and intending parents when it came to factors known to affect access to flu vaccination. One in three parents (32%) said they were unable to pay for the vaccine, with the concern slightly more common among intending (35%) than hesitant (28%) parents. Inconvenience was also an issue – 39% of parents said it was inconvenient for them to get their child vaccinated because they would have to take time off work (intending 37% versus hesitant 43%). Just under one in three parents said they would find it hard to travel to a health care provider to get the vaccine (30%) and one in four said they do not have time (27%), with no substantial difference between the two groups of parents.

Among parents who intend to vaccinate their child, two in three parents say they would prefer their child to have the flu vaccine at a local council clinic close to home. For intending parents of school-aged children, more than four in five (84%) would prefer it if their child's school offered flu vaccinations.

Needle fear is also a barrier: two in five of all parents (41%) said they would find it hard to get one or more of their children vaccinated against the flu because their child is afraid of needles.

Fear of needles and needle phobia

It is very common for children to fear needles. For some children, teens, and even adults, this fear can become so intense and distressing that it causes ongoing anxiety and leads them to avoid vaccinations. This is called 'needle phobia'. Children can start developing the signs of needle phobia from four years of age. Parents report that one in four (27%) children aged four years or more has an intense fear of needles with the highest rates among children aged seven to nine years. One in three children aged four to less than 10 years (33%), 29% of children aged 10 to less than 13 years, and 19% of children aged 13 to 17 years have an intense fear of needles.

One in eight children (13%) is reported to have a 'needle phobia', with a fear of needles so intense that it stops them from getting vaccinated against the flu. The level of needle phobia among male (14%) and female (12%) children is similar.

Parents of children who said their child had, or possibly had, needle phobia were asked if they were confident about knowing where to get help for their child's fear. Only one in five parents (20%) said they were very confident in knowing where to go for support for their child, 52% were somewhat confident and 28% were not at all confident. Parents of children aged six to 10 years were the least likely to be confident about where to get help for their child's needle phobia.

One in four children aged four years or more, has an intense fear of needles



Implications

Influenza (the flu) is a very contagious respiratory virus that is more common during the winter months in Australia. Anyone can catch the flu; it is spread by respiratory droplets and can also be contracted by people when they touch a surface that is contaminated with the virus. Common symptoms include fever, body aches, a runny nose and sore throat, but it can also affect other parts of the body. Yearly vaccinations are recommended for everyone aged six months or more and are the best way to prevent severe infections, hospitalisations and death due to flu.

Seasonal flu is a major public health problem which affects thousands of people worldwide and in Australia each year and it can cause death. There are several different strains of the flu and each year the predominant strains change. This is why the flu vaccine is recommended for all children six months and over each year. The number of people suffering from the flu has started to increase in Australia, and it is important children are vaccinated before the peak of the flu season. Proven public health measures such as vaccination substantially reduce the impact of flu on children and their families. Keeping children free of the flu helps ensure they do not miss out on attending school and social activities.

This Poll found that parents intend to vaccinate a majority of children against the flu in 2025 – a slight increase from previous years. However, parents remain unsure about vaccinating one in four and will not vaccinate one in six children. Hesitant parents are less likely to know that otherwise healthy children can become seriously unwell from the flu, or that annual flu vaccination is recommended for all children aged six months and older. Public health campaigns should target these knowledge gaps by providing clear, accessible information that empowers parents to make informed decisions about vaccination.

Parents without a regular GP are less likely to vaccinate their child. GPs play a vital role in providing trusted advice and reliable information for the whole family. In addition, parents need support in identifying trustworthy online sources about vaccination. Access and convenience is another major factor in uptake, with many people struggling to act on their intentions to vaccinate and finding it too hard to get the vaccination done. The vast majority of parents polled expressed a preference for local and convenient vaccination options, such as local council and school clinics. Governments should explore these options to facilitate those who wish to vaccinate their child in carrying through with their plans.

This poll also revealed that fear of needles is common among children – especially those under 10 years of age. Parents and vaccination providers can help prevent needle fear by creating positive early experiences and

Flu vaccination plans are uncertain for nearly a quarter of children this year



ensuring a calm, supportive environment. More than one in ten children have a needle phobia so severe that it stops them getting vaccinated against the flu. For these and other children, primary care providers and other health professionals can support parents by offering guidance on strategies and resources to help manage their child's fear.

As winter approaches, healthcare providers should actively promote flu vaccination – especially to families who are unsure or have not vaccinated in the past – as part of a broader effort to increase protection and reduce illness and complications from flu.

Data source and methods



The influenza (flu) vaccine is recommended for babies and children every year, from the time they are six months old. It is free in Australia for all children aged six months to under five years. The 2025 seasonal flu vaccine has been available for children in Australia since April this year. During April 2025, we surveyed a nationally representative sample (by age, sex and state of residence) of Australian parents of children aged between six months and 17 years about whether they intended to get their child vaccinated against flu this season and if their child had ever received the flu vaccine. Parents provided information about their knowledge of the flu and flu vaccine by rating their level of agreement with statements about the flu and the need, efficacy and safety of the flu vaccine. Parents also reported on whether their child had an intense fear of needles and about needle phobia that prevented vaccination.

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by the Online Research Unit for The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. Data were collected from a sample of 1,987 parents on 3,201 children aged between six months and 17 years. The survey was administered from 17 April to 30 April, to a randomly selected, stratified nationally representative sample of adults aged 18 and older. All respondents were parents or caregivers to children aged between six months and less than 18 years. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect Australian population figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Among Online Research Unit panel members contacted to participate the completion rate was 69%.

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