

**To** : Editors & Health Journalists

**Issued by** : National Institute for Communicable Diseases

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### **South Africa's 2025 Flu Season starts early: Get vaccinated now**

South Africa's influenza season has officially begun, and it has arrived earlier than expected. The flu season started in the week of 24 March 2025, which is four weeks earlier than last year and marks the earliest start to the flu season since 2010, based on pneumonia surveillance in public hospitals.

This early start doesn't mean that this year's flu season will be more severe than in previous years, but it does mean that now is the time to protect yourself and your loved ones by getting the flu vaccine. The seasonal influenza vaccine is available at public health clinics and through private healthcare providers, including general practitioners and pharmacies.

Although the vaccine is most effective when given before the season starts, it is not too late to get vaccinated. Protection develops about two weeks after vaccination, and annual vaccination is needed as flu viruses change over time and protection does not last from one year to the next.

For most people, flu symptoms are mild and resolve in a few days. But for some, influenza can lead to severe illness, hospitalisation, or even death. Those most at risk include:

- Pregnant women
- People living with HIV
- Individuals with chronic conditions like diabetes, lung disease, heart disease, tuberculosis, kidney disease, or obesity
- Older adults (65 years and older)
- Children younger than 2 years

These groups are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated as soon as possible, and to seek medical care early if they develop flu symptoms.

In addition, healthcare workers are also encouraged to get vaccinated to protect themselves and their patients who may be at increased risk of having severe influenza illness should they be infected.

The National Department of Health provides influenza vaccination free of charge to healthcare workers, individuals aged 65 years and older, individuals with

cardiovascular disease (including chronic heart disease, hypertension, or stroke), diabetes, chronic lung disease (including asthma, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), immunosuppressive conditions (e.g. living with HIV and AIDS, or malignancy), as well as pregnant women.

To reduce the spread of flu in your community, remember to:

- Wash your hands often
- Cover coughs and sneezes with your elbow or a tissue
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Stay home if you are feeling unwell

If your symptoms worsen or don't improve within 3–7 days, seek medical attention.

Clinicians are urged to consider influenza when diagnosing patients with respiratory illness this season.

Weekly updates on influenza and other circulating respiratory viruses such as RSV, SARS-CoV-2, and pertussis are available from the NICD:

[NICD Weekly Respiratory Pathogens Surveillance Report](#)

For guidelines on flu diagnosis and management:

[Influenza Guidelines 2024 \(PDF\)](#)

**ENDS/**

For enquiries and interview requests, please contact: [Media@nicd.ac.za](mailto:Media@nicd.ac.za).

Kind regards,

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National Institute for communicable Diseases