

## **First nationwide influenza vaccine program to target children aged 6 months to under five years**

**Influenza vaccination can help reduce hospitalisations, community transmission  
and the “double whammy” of combined influenza and COVID-19 infection**

**Sunday 26 April, Sydney** - More than a million Australian children aged between 6 months and under 5 years<sup>1</sup> can now receive a free influenza vaccine as part of the first National Immunisation Program to include all children in this age group.<sup>2</sup>

The Sanofi Pasteur influenza vaccine VAXIGRIP TETRA<sup>®</sup> will be used to vaccinate these children<sup>3</sup> under the 2020 National Immunisation Program (NIP), which aims to improve national immunisation coverage by providing free vaccines to eligible people.<sup>2</sup>

VAXIGRIP TETRA and other influenza vaccines available in Australia provide protection against four strains of the virus.<sup>3</sup> The expected circulating strains are identified by the World Health Organization every year so influenza vaccines can be manufactured.<sup>4</sup>

Dr Sarah Chu, General Practitioner at the Turbot Street Medical Centre, Brisbane, said a nationwide approach to influenza vaccination was particularly important in young children as they are at increased risk of hospitalisation caused by influenza.<sup>5,6</sup> Last year, in children under 5 years of age there were 36,569 reported cases of laboratory confirmed influenza and an estimated 5,000 related hospitalisations.<sup>7,8</sup>

Dr Chu said: "There has been a lot of focus on influenza in older Australians, but hospitalisation rates in children are too high for a virus that is preventable. Vaccination remains the most effective way to protect children against influenza."

As Australia works to contain and cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr Chu said the community needs to do all it can to minimise avoidable hospitalisations<sup>5,6</sup>, reduce transmission of influenza,<sup>9-11</sup> and the “double-whammy of infection with influenza and the coronavirus.”

“Vaccinating children also helps reduce the spread of influenza in those not vaccinated, so while the influenza vaccine does not protect against COVID-19, it can help the broader community stay healthy.”

Dr Chu said that many GPs had introduced protective measures for patients visiting their clinics and that the “stay at home message does not mean foregoing vaccination ahead of the flu season. An annual influenza vaccination is recommended for all Australians from 6 months and over.”

Sanofi Pasteur Australia and New Zealand Medical Director, Dr Christian Felter welcomed the extension of the NIP age range and the start of this year’s world-leading vaccination program. “A national approach to vaccinating children against influenza is a positive step – for families, the community and our health system,” he said.

“Vaccinating children against influenza not only protects them but helps to reduce influenza transmission to other vulnerable groups in the community, including those with existing health conditions such as cardiovascular disease and people aged 65 and above.”<sup>9-11</sup>

In previous years, free influenza vaccination under the NIP was only available to children at high risk of complications, including those with underlying health conditions and children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Since 2018, state and territory authorities have offered broader access to the influenza vaccine, but despite their best efforts only one-in-four children under five years was vaccinated.<sup>12</sup> The extension of the NIP age range followed a submission by Sanofi Pasteur to the Government’s advisory committee.

“We hope the move to a national influenza vaccination program will improve immunisation rates in young children and help reduce the number of people who contract the virus,” Dr Felter said.

“This is not the year to be complacent about the influenza vaccine. It can protect you, safeguard people around you and hopefully ease the pressure on our overburdened medical system.”

This year, the four strains contained in all influenza vaccines are A/Brisbane/02/2018 (H1N1), A/South Australia/34/2019 (H3N2), B/Washington/02/2019, and B/Phuket/3073/2013.<sup>3,4</sup> The 2020 NIP will provide free vaccinations to children aged between 6 months to under 5 years, those aged 65 and over, and people at high risk of complications, such as those with cardiovascular disease.<sup>2</sup>

For further information regarding influenza and vaccination, speak with a health care professional or visit: [www.vaccinehub.com.au/disease/influenza](http://www.vaccinehub.com.au/disease/influenza)

### **About Vaxigrip Tetra<sup>3</sup>**

Vaxigrip Tetra is a vaccine for persons 6 months of age and older. This vaccine helps protect people against influenza.

For a copy of the Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) for Vaxigrip Tetra please ask your health care professional or visit <http://www.guildlink.com.au/gc/ws/sw/cmi.cfm?product=swcvaxit11219>

A summary of this information is provided below, please review the CMI for further information.

Vaxigrip Tetra should not be administered if you are allergic to any of the vaccine ingredients.

Tell your doctor if you have an acute illness with or without high temperature, or you have had Guillain-Barré syndrome (severe muscle weakness) after getting an influenza vaccine, or have had an immune response problem because the immune response to the vaccine may be diminished. Tell your doctor if you have bleeding problems or bruise easily or have ever fainted from an injection. Tell your doctor if you have a known allergy to egg protein.

Some medicines may interfere with Vaxigrip Tetra and affect how it works. Tell your doctor if you are taking, have recently taken or might take any other vaccines or medicines, including any medicines, vitamins or supplements that you buy without a prescription from your pharmacy, supermarket or health food shop.

Your doctor will advise you if Vaxigrip Tetra is to be given with another vaccine.

Like all medicines, Vaxigrip Tetra can have side effects. If you do experience any side effects, most of them are minor and temporary. However, some side effects may need medical attention. The most common adverse reactions observed are injection site reactions: pain, tenderness, redness, swelling, bruising and hardness at the injection site. Other reactions: feeling unwell, headache, muscle aches, fever and shivering. In addition, children may experience irritability, abnormal crying, drowsiness, appetite loss and vomiting. Severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) has been reported.

For more information about Sanofi vaccines please contact Sanofi Medical Information on 1800 818 806.

### About Sanofi

Sanofi is dedicated to supporting people through their health challenges. We are a global biopharmaceutical company focused on human health. We prevent illness with vaccines, provide innovative treatments to fight pain and ease suffering. We stand by the few who suffer from rare diseases and the millions with long-term chronic conditions.

With more than 100,000 people in 100 countries, Sanofi is transforming scientific innovation into healthcare solutions around the globe.

Sanofi, Empowering Life

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