

# General **Communique**

## Communicable Diseases Branch

Queensland Public Health and Scientific Services (QPHaSS)



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## Schools and early childhood education and care providers: Acute respiratory infections (ARI)

April 2024

### Key messages for sharing in schools and early education and care providers

All Queenslanders have a role to play in ARI prevention by following these key messages:

- **Get your FREE vaccinations** in 2024 for influenza and COVID-19 if you are eligible.
- **Stay at home** when you are sick (including keeping sick children home from school or childcare)
- **Clean your hands** regularly and thoroughly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- If you need to leave the house while unwell, **maintain physical distance** from others and **consider wearing a mask** when you cannot physically distance.
- **Practice good respiratory hygiene** by:
  - coughing or sneezing into a tissue or the inside of your elbow
  - discarding used tissues immediately in a bin, and
  - cleaning your hands thoroughly.
- **Clean frequently touched surfaces** such as door handles, tapware, tabletops, remote controls, mobile devices (e.g., phones, laptops etc), benchtops and fridge doors and clean your hands after cleaning.
- **Ensure good ventilation** by opening windows and doors and spending time outside in the fresh air each day.

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## Acute Respiratory Infections (ARIs)

Viruses that cause acute respiratory infection (ARI), including influenza (flu), COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), can result in significant disruption to schools and the wider community. While the viruses are different, the strategies to prevent them are largely the same.

ARIs can spread quickly in schools where large numbers of students learn and play in close contact with each other. Preventing ARIs is a joint effort and parents, caregivers, and staff need to work together and take the necessary precautions to stop ARIs from circulating. ARIs can cause serious illness and complications in otherwise healthy people.

### Symptoms

The symptoms of ARI are varied and may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Runny nose/nasal congestion
- Muscle and joint pain
- Tiredness or extreme exhaustion
- Headache
- Sore throat, and
- Sometimes gastrointestinal symptoms.

Anyone experiencing ARI symptoms and who is concerned should contact their general practitioner or 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for medical advice.

### Vaccinations

#### Influenza

- Free influenza vaccination is available for all Queenslanders 6 months of age and older.
- People at greatest risk of severe disease should prioritise being vaccinated, including:
  - All children aged 6 months to less than 5 years,
  - Pregnant people at any stage of pregnancy,
  - Persons 65 years or older,
  - All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 6 months and older,
  - All people 6 months and older with medical conditions which increase their risk of severe influenza and its complications.

The free flu vaccine is available from GPs, pharmacies, and other vaccination service providers. The flu vaccine can be given at the same time as other vaccines (e.g. COVID-19). Find out [Where to get vaccinated | Vaccination Matters \(initiatives.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/initiatives/vaccination-matters).

#### COVID-19

Free COVID-19 primary course vaccination is recommended for all people aged 18 years or older, and for children aged 6 months to less than 18 years with medical conditions that may increase their risk of severe disease or death from COVID-19. Further doses every 6 or 12 months are recommended, or can be considered, based on an individual's age and presence

of risk factors for severe disease. The [COVID-19 booster eligibility checker](#) can be used to check eligibility.

## RSV

Queensland Health will provide free RSV immunisation to eligible Queensland infants and young children commencing from 15 April 2024 in birthing hospitals and 29 April 2024 in primary care.

- All newborn infants from birth:
  - All infants born on or from 1 February 2024.
  - This will be offered at time of birth or prior to discharge from hospital.
  - Infants who are not immunised in hospital can access this dose up until they are less 8 months of age.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants up to less than 8 months of age.
- Infants with certain complex medical conditions up to less than 8 months of age.
- Young children with certain complex medical conditions from 8 to 19 months of age (inclusive), until 31 October 2024.

For more information see the [Queensland Paediatric Respiratory Syncytial Virus Prevention Program | Queensland Health](#)

## Resources

[Children, young people and parents – COVID-19.](#)

[COVID-19 in Queensland | Health and wellbeing | Queensland Government \(www.qld.gov.au\)](#)

[COVID-19 vaccine advice and recommendations for 2024 | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

[Flu prevention resources for education sector](#)

[Influenza \(the flu\) | Communicable disease control guidance \(health.qld.gov.au\)](#)

[Influenza \(the flu\) | Health and wellbeing | Queensland Government \(www.qld.gov.au\)](#)

[Influenza in education and care services](#)

[Queensland Government - COVID-19 in Queensland](#)

[Queensland Health Disease prevention in education and care services](#)