

2023 Winter Strategy and Plan

The 2023 Plan supports Tasmania's health system during winter to manage acute respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19 and influenza (flu), to provide high quality health care to our community. It focuses on planning, prevention, detection, and early treatment of acute respiratory illnesses, to minimise health harms and health system strain. It is informed by consultation with public and private representatives across the health sector. The key elements of the plan are:

Maximising vaccination

Vaccination is the principal means of reducing the harms of COVID-19 and flu in the Tasmanian community.

Objectives of the 2023 flu and COVID-19 vaccination campaign are to:

- maximise flu vaccinations, particularly for people at risk of severe illness.
- support the primary care sector to achieve high vaccination coverage of residential aged and disability care residents and staff.
- maximise uptake of COVID-19 vaccines, including boosters, in accordance with ATAGI guidance.
- promote and enable vaccination uptake by eligible people in the wider population.
- support current Department of Health workplace programs to achieve high vaccine uptake amongst staff.

Everyone aged six months and older should get an annual flu vaccine. Everyone aged 18 years and older can get a 2023 COVID-19 booster if it's been at least six months since their last dose or COVID-19 infection.

You can get your flu and COVID-19 vaccines in the same appointment.

Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are available at general practices, some local pharmacies and council clinics.

Health system preparedness

Tasmania's primary care sector is the key provider of clinical care to Tasmanians with acute respiratory illnesses. The 2023 Winter Plan aims to support our primary care sector in this role this winter.

A series of winter and peak demand strategies prepared across Tasmania's public hospitals include strengthened coordination and escalation planning, short-term increases or adjustments to bed capacity, and brokered access to private hospital or residential aged care beds.

The COVID@homeplus program will continue to support Tasmanians who test positive to COVID-19 to receive virtual care at home, as well as eligible Tasmanians who have symptoms of flu and other respiratory infections and are at higher risk of severe illness.

Ambulance Tasmania's Winter Service Delivery Strategy 2023 has been developed to guide the management of winter respiratory illnesses.

Surveillance

"Tasmania's COVID-19 Surveillance Report" has changed to become "Tasmania's Respiratory Surveillance Report".

In addition to COVID-19, Tasmania's Respiratory Surveillance Report will present data on influenza-like-illness, influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and other circulating respiratory viruses. It will still be published fortnightly.

Testing and treatment

Oral antiviral medications to treat COVID-19 and flu are listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). They require a prescription from a doctor and are supplied through community pharmacies.

If a person does not have access to a GP or their GP is not available, COVID@homeplus can provide a referral for PCR lab testing and prescription for antiviral medication following diagnosis.

Winter Wellness campaign

The *Winter Wellness* campaign supports the 2023 Winter Plan. It uses an integrated multi-channel approach and encourages Tasmanians to take steps to minimise their risk of severe respiratory illness during winter.

- **Prepare:** by being up to date with your vaccinations – they'll boost your immunity against COVID-19 and the flu to reduce severe illness if you get sick.
- **Plan:** if you're at higher risk of severe illness, make a plan with your healthcare provider for access to testing and antiviral medication if you get sick.
- **Protect:** yourself and others by washing your hands, covering your coughs and sneezes and staying at home if you're unwell.

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