

Media Release, Friday April 8th 2022

Australians urged to prepare for resurgence of flu

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and Consumer Health Forum (CHF) are urging Australians to prepare for a potential resurgence of influenza (flu) and get vaccinated early.

The pandemic has led to decreased exposure to the influenza virus and lower influenza vaccine coverage compared to previous years. But with an end to lockdowns and state and international borders reopening, a resurgence of influenza is expected in 2022, prompting warnings of a potentially monster flu season ahead.

Annual vaccination should ideally occur before the onset of each influenza season, which usually occurs from June to September in most parts of Australia. The influenza vaccination program will commence in April, providing protection before the peak of the expected season.

The annual Influenza vaccine is recommended for everyone aged six months or older. It's free under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for children aged 6-months to 5-years and adults 65 years and over, as well as pregnant women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people with certain medical conditions.

RACGP President Professor Karen Price urged Australians to prepare for the influenza season.

"GPs are concerned about this year's flu season because Australians haven't been exposed to the virus for the past two years like we were in the years before the pandemic," she said.

"Children born since the start of the pandemic are likely to have had no exposure to the influenza virus in their lifetime, meaning it's now more important than ever to ensure they are protected.

"Flu is something to be taken seriously – in 2019, just before the pandemic, there were 953 influenza related deaths in Australia. And we are already starting to see cases in some parts of the country.

"Australia has among the highest vaccination rates in the world. And our response to COVID shows prevention really is much better than cure; our high COVID vaccination rates are why we've done so well. Now it's time to protect yourself against influenza, it's another jab for sure, but it's a win for you and your community.

"Getting your flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available in April gives you protection before the expected peak of the influenza season.

"Remember, the vaccine rolls out across the country from April. Most practices will only open bookings when they receive stock, and your practice may notify you when this happens.

"So, I encourage everyone to be proactive and prepare for influenza season. Check your practice's website and have a chat with your GP or nurse at your next visit to see when the vaccine is available, and book in for your jab when you can.

"And if you do call your practice, remember our receptionists have been under a great deal of pressure during the pandemic and clinics are busier than usual, so please be patient and understanding.

"It's also important to keep up the great hygiene practices we've learned during the pandemic, including hand washing, coughing into your elbow, and wearing a face mask and staying at home if you're sick. Because all these measures help protect us from the flu, as well as winter colds."

Consumers Health Forum CEO, Ms Leanne Wells said that Australians should continue to follow health advice as winter approaches and the flu season emerges.

"Australians have taken up vaccination at record rates to protect themselves against the COVID-19 virus, and due to this, the worst predictions of severe illness and death have not happened," said Ms Wells.

"We encourage people to continue keeping up with vaccinations to protect themselves and their families from severe effects of the flu and any future outbreaks of COVID-19.

"Vaccines are rigorously tested for safety before being offered to the public in Australia, so the chances of any complications from them are very small, compared to the risks of severe illness from the flu or COVID-19.

"If you have questions about vaccination, you should talk to a trusted medical expert. Your GP will be able to advise you on when to get your next vaccination," she said.

Diabetes Australia Group CEO Justine Cain urged all Australians living with diabetes to make an appointment to get their flu vaccine as soon as possible.

"Flu is a highly infectious disease that can make anyone sick, but people living with all types of diabetes are at a much higher risk of developing serious health complications than people without diabetes," Ms Cain said.

"For some people living with diabetes flu can even be life-threatening so please get your flu vaccine, schedule your COVID booster and keep yourself healthy this flu season.

"Don't delay – book your flu vaccine today."

~ENDS

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About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) is the peak representative organisation for general practice, the backbone of Australia's health system. We set the standards for general practice, facilitate lifelong learning for GPs, connect the general practice community, and advocate for better health and wellbeing for all Australians.

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About CHF

The Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) is the national peak body representing the interests of Australian healthcare consumers. CHF works to achieve safe, quality, timely healthcare for all Australians, supported by accessible health information and systems.

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About Diabetes Australia

Diabetes Australia is the national organisation supporting all people living with or at risk of diabetes. We put people first. We work in collaboration with member organisations, consumers, health professionals, researchers and the community. For more information visit: www.diabetesaustralia.com.au