

Chief Health Officer Alert for health professionals

16 July 2012

Status: Resolved

Influenza season has arrived

It's not too late for a flu vaccination!

The 2012 influenza season is here with an increase in numbers confirmed across Australia. Chief Health Officer, Dr Rosemary Lester is urging Victorian doctors to note the arrival of the influenza season and urge protective measures, particularly vaccination, in order to protect their patients and patients' families.

What is the current situation with influenza?

More than 10,000 cases of influenza have been reported nationally year-to-date. In Victoria there have been a total of 1,357 cases of influenza year-to-date. This compares to 719 cases for the same period in 2011 as this season has arrived earlier.

Key Prevention Activities

These include:

- Timely vaccination for those most at risk of severe disease
- Vaccination of health care workers, especially those in high risk settings
- Hand hygiene and respiratory/cough etiquette
- Early treatment for people at risk of severe disease
- Symptomatic individuals should not attend school, childcare, work or public gatherings

Immunisation is the best way to protect against influenza.

The vaccine is strongly recommended and free for anyone in the following categories:

- Everyone 65 years of age and over
- Pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy
- Indigenous people 15 years of age and over
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- Any person 6 months of age and over with a chronic condition predisposing to severe influenza illness that requires regular medical follow-up or hospitalisation such as:
 - cardiac disease (excluding simple hypertension)
 - chronic respiratory disease including severe asthmatics
 - chronic renal or liver disease
 - diabetes mellitus
 - chronic metabolic diseases
 - immunosuppression (including cancers, HIV infection, immunosuppressive drugs)
 - chronic neurological conditions

Public Health focus

Public health actions focus on outbreaks in high-risk settings such as:

- Hospitals and other health care facilities
- Special schools
- Residential and aged care facilities
- Health care workers in high-risk settings

These settings are encouraged to report suspected respiratory outbreaks to the Department of Health. DH can then provide support to manage the outbreak, including advising testing to confirm or rule out influenza.

Patient management

Patient management including testing, use of antivirals and personal protective equipment should be as per standard seasonal influenza management and at the clinicians' discretion. This applies equally for influenza strains identified as H1N1 pandemic strain or other circulating strains such as H3N2 or influenza B. Treatment is generally thought to be of greatest benefit if commenced early (ideally within 48 hours of symptom onset), and if targeted to people at highest risk of complications.

Notification

Laboratory confirmed influenza is notifiable to the Department of Health. Suspected respiratory outbreaks in high-risk settings are also recommended to be communicated to DH.

For notification and for further information please contact Communicable Disease Prevention and Control at DH on 1300 651 160.

Fight flu – protect yourself and those in your care with an influenza vaccination.

Further information

Seasonal influenza vaccination:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/factsheets/influenza.htm>

Better Health Channel factsheets on immunisation and influenza:

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Flu_immunisation?open

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Flu_influenza?open

NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24



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