

Chief Health Officer Alert for consumers

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 more than 10,000 cases confirmed across Australia. Victoria has seen a total of 1,357 cases compared to 719 cases for the same period in 2011, which means that this year's season has started earlier than in recent years.

Chief Health Officer, Dr Rosemary Lester is urging Victorians to take the risks of influenza seriously and consider protective measures, particularly vaccination, in order to protect themselves and those in their care.

What is influenza?

Influenza, commonly known as the flu, is caused by a highly contagious virus that is spread by coughs and sneezes. The flu is more than a bad cold: while cold symptoms can last a few days, the flu can last up to two weeks and in at risk groups, can lead to life-threatening complications including pneumonia.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually occur one to three days after infection and may include sudden onset of:

- fever
- chills
- cough
- sore throat
- headache
- muscle aches
- severe tiredness
- loss of appetite

How can I avoid getting influenza?

Immunisation is the best way to protect against influenza.

It's important to be vaccinated every year because protection only lasts up to a year and as the influenza virus changes frequently, in most years the vaccine is updated. The vaccine is strongly recommended and free for anyone

- 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
 - respiratory disease including severe asthmatics
 - kidney disease
 - diabetes
 - impaired immunity
 - neuromuscular disease

Practise good personal hygiene

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Throw the tissue in a plastic-lined rubbish bin after use.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth as germs spread that way.
- Don't go to work if you are unwell and don't send your children to school or child care if they are unwell.

Can I get influenza from the vaccine?

Influenza vaccine cannot give you a dose of influenza because it contains no active virus. Some people who get influenza vaccine may still get the flu but they will usually get a milder case than those who were not vaccinated

What about side effects from the vaccine?

Common side effects include pain, redness and swelling at the injection site, low grade temperature, muscle aches, fatigue and a temporary small lump at the injection site. These side effects will usually resolve within a few days.

Fight flu and discuss influenza vaccination with your doctor.

Further information

Better Health Channel factsheets:

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

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