



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

Dear Community Care Provider

Influenza (flu) is of particular concern to people 65 years and over, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders 15 years of age and over, people with chronic diseases and pregnant women. Your organisation provides services to older people living in the community and I am writing to encourage you to help protect your staff and clients from serious or life-threatening illness due to influenza. This letter, and the attached Fact Sheet, will inform you of the main interventions for the prevention and management of influenza outbreaks.

Influenza is an acute, highly infectious respiratory viral infection and is a notifiable disease in all states and territories if laboratory confirmed. To help prevent outbreaks and spread of influenza, you should ensure that you, your staff and your clients have good hand hygiene and infection control practices in place for seasonal influenza. You may need to advise family and other visitors who are unwell with influenza symptoms not to visit your clients. Any staff with influenza symptoms should stay at home and not come to work until they are free of symptoms or their doctor has advised they are fit to return to work.

This year's seasonal influenza vaccine protects against the pandemic influenza (H1N1) 2009 strain as well as two other strains. People who are eligible for free seasonal influenza vaccine who have previously been vaccinated against pandemic influenza (H1N1) 2009 should be given seasonal influenza vaccine in autumn to ensure protection against the other two strains that could possibly circulate this winter.

The four essential interventions for the prevention and management of influenza outbreaks are:

1. Vaccination of clients and staff
2. Application of appropriate infection control practices
3. Outbreak recognition and management (including laboratory confirmation, and use of antiviral medication for treatment and prophylaxis of staff and clients, where practicable and appropriate)
4. Policy development and planning to support vaccination and infection control.

The attached Fact Sheet contains more information on the interventions listed above.

Are you prepared for an outbreak of flu?

- Are staff informed and able to provide advice to clients on the importance of influenza vaccination?
- Do you have an influenza vaccination program for your staff? Are staff vaccination records updated regularly?
- Do you have a system in place to ensure that family and friends of your clients are notified in the case of an outbreak of influenza?
- Do staff know how to carry out correct hand hygiene and infection control practices?
- Do you have an updated infection control plan in place?

The *Fightflu* website - developed by the National Institute of Clinical Studies - provides tips to increase vaccination rates for health workers, as well as resources to assist in raising awareness and educating staff on the importance of vaccination. The address for the website is <http://www.fightflu.gov.au>.

The attached Fact Sheet contains more information and provides linkages to other resources that may be useful to you as you prepare for a possible outbreak of flu.

Yours sincerely,

[Authorised for electronic transmission]

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FACT SHEET ON INFLUENZA VACCINATION 2010

Important Facts

- In 2009, there was a global influenza pandemic caused by the pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza strain. In Australia, there were 37,636 confirmed cases of influenza due to this strain, 4992 hospitalisations, 681 admissions to intensive care and 191 deaths. A specific vaccine (Panvax[®] H1N1) was developed to protect against this new strain. The Australian Government has offered Panvax[®] H1N1 free to all Australians through a range of locations throughout the country. This vaccine continues to be available free to anyone who wishes to be protected against pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza.
- From 1 January 2010 the Government extended eligibility for free seasonal influenza vaccine under the National Immunisation Program. Seasonal influenza vaccine protects against three strains of influenza, which vary each year depending on which strains are expected to circulate during the influenza season,.

National Immunisation Program eligibility for seasonal influenza vaccine

- Under the National Immunisation Program, anyone 65 years of age and over, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 15 years and over, pregnant women, and people with chronic medical conditions will now be eligible to receive the free flu vaccine.
- People with some chronic medical conditions are at increased risk of complications from flu and may now be eligible for free seasonal flu vaccine. These include anyone who has a condition such as:
 - heart disease;
 - chronic respiratory conditions;
 - chronic illness requiring medical follow-up or hospitalisation in the past year;
 - diseases of the neuromuscular system;
 - impaired immunity; or
 - children aged between 6 months and 10 years on long-term aspirin therapy.
- Flu vaccinations are the single most effective action in helping fight the spread of influenza in the community.
- Anyone who has received the pandemic H1N1 vaccination and is in one of the eligible groups also needs to have the seasonal influenza vaccination to ensure full protection this flu season. For adults and older children (aged 10 years and over) there is no recommended dose interval between the H1N1 vaccine and seasonal vaccines. Vaccination with seasonal influenza vaccine should not be delayed because of recent Panvax[®] H1N1 vaccination.

- People in any of the groups mentioned in this Fact Sheet should talk with their doctor or immunisation provider about getting the vaccine.
- Vaccines are available directly from GP surgeries, immunisation providers, and Aboriginal Medical Services.
- State and Territory health authorities can assist you with information on the availability of vaccine supplies for your clients and staff.

State/Territory Health Authority contacts for influenza vaccine supplies

ACT 02 6205 2300 (supply GPs who visit aged care homes)
SA 08 8226 7177 (for resident vaccines) and 08 8226 7302 (for staff vaccines)
NSW Your Local Public Health Unit
Tas 1800 671 738
NT 08 8922 8307 (Royal Darwin Hospital pharmacy)
Vic 1300 882 008
Qld 07 3234 1500
WA 08 9321 1312

Further information about seasonal influenza vaccination under the National Immunisation Program is available on the Immunise Australia website at <http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/>

Updated evidence and information about influenza and vaccination is available at the 'Fight Flu' website of the National Institute of Clinical Studies at <http://www.fightflu.gov.au>