



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

Dear Directors of Nursing and Care Managers

PREPARING FOR SEASONAL INFLUENZA

Each year as the 'flu season' approaches, we are reminded of the importance of protecting our residents and staff against influenza.

Annual vaccination is the single most effective protection against influenza:

- ◆ This is particularly the case in residential care facilities where research indicates that 'flu vaccines have prevented a significant number of cases of pneumonia, hospital admissions and influenza-related deaths.
- ◆ Ensure all residents that consent have access to influenza vaccination.
- ◆ In the event of an influenza outbreak, your staff are at risk of transmitting the influenza virus not only to residents and other staff but also to family members and friends.
- ◆ For this reason, current Australian guidelines recommend annual vaccination for staff of nursing homes and long term care facilities to protect those at high risk.

Are you ready for the 2009 'flu season'?

- ◆ Do you have an influenza vaccination program to encourage high rates of vaccination for your residents?
- ◆ Are resident vaccination records updated regularly?
- ◆ Do you have an influenza vaccination program for your staff?
- ◆ Are staff vaccination records updated regularly?
- ◆ Do you have an updated infection control plan in place?
- ◆ Do you know who to contact in case of an outbreak of influenza in your aged care home?
- ◆ Do your staff understand and carry out correct hand hygiene and infection control practices?
- ◆ Do you have a system to ensure that family and friends are notified in case of an outbreak of influenza?

Please work with your GPs to ensure residents are vaccinated and staff are protected. Vaccinating health care workers protects them, their colleagues and all the other people in their care. You can also access updated evidence and information about influenza and vaccination at the 'Fight Flu' website of the National Institute of Clinical Studies on <http://www.fightflu.gov.au>.

State and territory health authorities can assist you with information on the availability of vaccine supplies.

State/Territory Health Authority contacts for influenza vaccine supplies

ACT 02 6205 2300 (details of GPs who visit aged care homes to provide vaccination)
SA 08 8226 7177 (for resident vaccines) and 08 8226 7302 (for staff vaccines)
NSW Your Local Public Health Unit
Tas 03 6222 7724
NT 08 8922 8307 (Royal Darwin Hospital pharmacy)
Vic 1300 882 008
Qld 07 3234 1500 (details of GPs who visit aged care homes to provide vaccination)
WA Contact CSL on 08 9329 7322

You may find the attached brochure *'Flu & Gastro: Managing infectious diseases in aged care homes'* useful in providing family, friends and carers of residents with information on influenza before and/or during an outbreak. Further information on the prevention and management of influenza in aged care homes is provided in the *Influ-Info Influenza Kit for Aged Care Homes*. You can request copies of these resources through National Mail and Marketing on 1800 020 103 or at nmm@nationalmailing.com.au

A new strain of influenza, the H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) virus, has caused outbreaks of influenza in Mexico, USA and Canada and cases have occurred in a number of other countries around the world. This new virus has not reached the pandemic stage. As at 10 May 2009, only 1 case of this new strain has been confirmed in Australia, however, more cases may occur here in the future.

At this stage you do not need to implement any additional measures or precautions for residents or staff, but you should ensure that you have good hand hygiene and infection control practices in place as for seasonal influenza. Advise family and other visitors who are unwell with influenza symptoms not to visit residents.

Any staff with influenza symptoms should stay home and not come to work until they are free of symptoms or their doctor has advised they are fit to return to work.

General information about H1N1 Influenza 09 (Human Swine Influenza) is available via the Commonwealth Health HOTLINE for Swine Influenza (Telephone 1802007) or the Department of Health and Ageing's health emergency website at <http://www.healthemergency.gov.au/>

Yours sincerely



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