Compulsory flu vaccination for aged care workers

The Turnbull Government will investigate ways to boost vaccination rates among workers in aged care facilities, including making the flu vaccine compulsory, following an increase in deaths this winter.

Health Minister Greg Hunt has requested Australia’s Chief Medical Officer, Professor Brendan Murphy, investigate ways to ensure all aged care workers are properly vaccinated against flu.

“I will work with the medical authorities, health care workers and the aged care providers on how we can make it compulsory for those working in aged care facilities,” Minister Hunt said.

“We cannot continue to have a situation where people, whose immunity is already low, are at risk from others who may be infected.”

“Our job is to protect those who need our care,” Minister Hunt said.

This type of action has never been undertaken before by any previous government.

At present there is no requirement for aged care workers to be vaccinated under law, however providers have a duty of care to provide the safest possible environment for their residents and carers.

This year more than 4.5 million doses of the influenza vaccine were provided at no cost to Australians who were most at risk from the flu.

Under the National Immunisation Program, those eligible for a free flu shot include people aged 65 years and over, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those who suffer from chronic conditions.
This investigation follows deaths of seven elderly residents at St John’s Retirement Village in Wangaratta in Victoria and reports of fatalities from flu at Strathdevon Aged Care in Tasmania.

Aged Care Minister Ken Wyatt has instructed the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency to conduct an urgent review into the practices of all aged care facilities.

“Older people are always vulnerable to the flu, but the many deaths this year are unacceptable,” Minister Wyatt said.”

Over 90,000 cases of influenza have been reported this year, which is two and a half times the amount recorded in the same period last year.

(ENDS)