



THE HON SUSSAN LEY MP

Minister for Health
Minister for Sport

MEDIA RELEASE

8 July 2015

Record numbers of Australians coming down with flu

Minister for Health Sussan Ley today urged people to get their flu shots in response to new statistics that show the number of flu cases in Australia are up by over 50 per cent in 2015 as compared to the same time last year.

Ms Ley said 14,124 flu cases had been reported so far this year across Australia as compared to 9,258 cases at the same time in 2014 including almost 2,000 cases in the past week.

Ms Ley said vaccination was the single most effective way to protect against the flu, which contributed to over 3,000 Australian deaths annually.

“Last year’s flu season was one of the worst on record and we have already seen a 50 per cent increase or almost 5,000 additional cases across Australia so far this year,” Ms Ley said.

“The more people who are vaccinated, the less chance the illness spreads throughout the rest of the community. This is particularly true for those Australians who are ill, vulnerable, pregnant or elderly.

“The message is simple – get your flu shot before the flu gets you this winter.”

Ms Ley said so far this year 4.5 million doses of flu vaccination had been bought under the National Immunisation Program (NIP), which is 200,000 more than were distributed in 2014.

“The peak period for the flu season is regularly between August and September and with most people usually taking up to three weeks to develop immunity following their flu shot now is the time to go your flu jab,” Ms Ley said.

“The vaccine not only reduces the chance of getting the flu but it also minimises the severity, complications and hospitalisations if you do.”

The Chief Medical Officer Professor Chris Baggoley said people who had the seasonal flu vaccine in 2014 still needed to have it in 2015, particularly this year following a rare double strain change in the vaccine.

Professor Baggoley said the unusual double strain was consistent with national and international advice.

“Each year the vaccine contains three virus strains. The 2015 vaccine contains new virus strains which are different to last year’s to ensure Australians were protected against the most likely strains,” Professor Chris Baggoley.

“Flu is highly contagious and spreads easily from person to person, through the air, and on the hands.”

Professor Baggoley specifically encouraged people at risk, including older people, pregnant women, Indigenous Australians and people with chronic conditions such as cardiac disease, chronic respiratory conditions and chronic illnesses to take advantage of the free vaccine, and to do so now.

“We need to get higher uptake among these groups – immunisation is still the best form of protection from influenza and healthcare professionals play an essential role in ensuring high uptake,” Professor Baggoley said.

The flu vaccine is free to Australians 65 and over, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 6 months to less than five years and 15 and over, pregnant women and anyone aged six months and over with certain chronic conditions. Flu shots for these at-risk groups are funded by the Australian Government through the Immunise Australia Program.

Speak to your GP or immunisation provider for more information about eligibility for the free vaccine.

For more information about the 2015 seasonal influenza vaccine, visit www.immunise.health.gov.au

Table 1. Notifications of laboratory confirmed influenza, Australia, 1 January to 6 July, 2010 to 2015, by jurisdiction

| Jurisdiction | 2010* | 2011* | 2012* | 2013* | 2014* | 5 year average | 2015* |
|--------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|----------------|--------|
| ACT | 14 | 62 | 231 | 90 | 129 | 105 | 229 |
| NSW | 311 | 1,597 | 3,258 | 1,168 | 1,994 | 1,666 | 2,847 |
| NT | 40 | 343 | 186 | 172 | 298 | 208 | 84 |
| QLD | 473 | 3,195 | 2,623 | 1,494 | 3,011 | 2,159 | 4,064 |
| SA | 119 | 1,320 | 2,063 | 820 | 1,121 | 1,089 | 2,696 |
| TAS | 25 | 92 | 119 | 22 | 143 | 80 | 169 |
| VIC | 229 | 708 | 1,314 | 943 | 1,610 | 961 | 2,457 |
| WA | 152 | 327 | 1,267 | 541 | 952 | 648 | 1,578 |
| Australia | 1,363 | 7,644 | 11,061 | 5,250 | 9,258 | 6,915 | 14,124 |

Source: NNDSS, extracted 6 July 2015

* For the period 1 January to 6 July.

ENDS

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