

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 23 April 2018

The best time to get your flu shot is...now!

Dr Lee Fong, Senior Clinical Director of GP Access After Hours, has urged the Hunter community to get their influenza vaccinations as soon as possible for the best chance of protection.

"The cold, rainy winds of autumn have finally started to sweep the region, bringing with it sniffles, coughs...and influenza," Dr Fong said.

"Influenza is different to a cold. With the flu, fever, headache, aches and pains, dry cough and feeling really tired/weak are front and centre, whereas with a cold, sneezing and a stuffy nose are the major symptoms. Don't forget that people can be infectious from 24 hours before they feel sick, to a week afterwards.

"Lots of people get the flu every year – somewhere between 5 and 10% usually, but sometimes as much as 20% in a bad year. For children, the numbers are even higher – somewhere between 10 and 40% typically. This results in about 13,500 hospital admissions every year, and around 3,000 deaths – which is more than double our national road toll!"

Dr Fong said that vaccination is the only way to specifically reduce the chance of getting an influenza infection and vaccines need to be given each year, because the influenza viruses are always changing. Contrary to popular belief, influenza vaccine does not contain any live viruses, and therefore cannot give you the flu.

"Recent evidence suggests the flu vaccine works best 3-4 months after the vaccination is given, so, to get the best protection when the flu season is likely to peak, see your GP to get your flu vaccination in late April or early May."

Those at particularly high risk from influenza and its complications are pregnant women and those over 65 years of age. Influenza vaccination is recommended for anybody over the age of 6 months, and free influenza vaccine is available for:

- all Australians aged 6 months to <5 years
- all Australians aged 65 and over – there is a special "enhanced" vaccine available for this group
- all Australians aged 6 months of age and over with medical conditions that can lead to severe influenza
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are aged 15 years or over
- all pregnant women - the vaccine is safe for pregnant women and provides protection for themselves and their new born baby for the first six months after birth.

For interview opportunities with Dr Fong, contact Katie Vullo on 02 4935 3171 or 0407 956 861.

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