Protect yourself against the flu—get vaccinated

Sunshine Coast parents are being urged to vaccinate their children this flu season, with figures showing a large number of young people contracted influenza in 2015.

Children and youths under 20 years of age made up a staggering 40 per cent of all notified cases of influenza in Queensland last year, and a fifth of all influenza related hospital admissions.

Nine per cent of hospitalised children with confirmed influenza spent time in the Intensive Care Unit in 2015.

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service Public Health Physician Dr Andrew Langley says influenza is more easily spread where large numbers of people gather together, meaning children often contract the virus in schools and day cares.

“The flu is actually very common in healthy children, with 10 to 40 per cent of the population infected each year and approximately one per cent of these infections resulting in hospitalisation.

“People of all ages are susceptible to the flu, in the general community, the percentage of people affected by flu each year is typically between five and 10 per cent, but may be up to 20 per cent in some years,” Dr Langley said.

This year’s government influenza immunisation is a quadrivalent, or four-strain, vaccine. The new vaccine includes the additional B strain known as the Brisbane strain, alongside the Phuket (B), Hong Kong (A) and California (A) strains.

Last year, 100,569 Australians suffered from laboratory confirmed influenza.

There have been 224 reported cases of influenza on the Sunshine Coast this year. 19 of those cases have required hospitalisation in Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service public hospitals.

“That’s almost three times higher than average for this time of year. In 2015 we had 2341 laboratory confirmed notifications for the entire year. We suspect many other people have the flu each year but do not have laboratory testing.”

It is recommended that all pregnant women should be immunised against influenza as early as possible in pregnancy. Pregnant women are at increased risk of influenza-associated morbidity and mortality.
SCHHS staff are leading by example, with about 2000 of its 5400 staff being vaccinated against flu in the first two weeks of the health service’s staff flu vaccination program.

The flu vaccine is now available at G.P. clinics and pharmacies. Australia’s national immunisation program recommends and funds free flu vaccinations for:

- people aged 65 years and older
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged from 6 months to less than five years
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or older
- pregnant women
- anyone over six months of age with a medical condition such as heart disease, respiratory disease, diabetes, kidney disease, asthma, immunosuppression and chronic neurological conditions
- children aged five to 10 years on long-term aspirin therapy.

FACTS

- Children and young adults aged less than 20 years accounted for 40 per cent of all influenza notifications and 20 per cent of admissions in Queensland in 2015.
- Nine per cent of hospitalised children who had confirmed influenza were admitted directly to ICU in 2015.
- Covering the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and washing hands before eating and drinking can greatly prevent the likelihood of contact with the virus.

ENDS

Media contact: Alexia Kelly | 5470 5833

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