

media release

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Influenza research recognised in top 10 research projects of 2013

A study focused on highlighting the severity of influenza in children has been recognised by the Australian Government and the National Health and Medical Research Council as one of the top ten research projects of 2013.

The project, which was led by chief investigator, Professor Elizabeth Elliott, Director of the Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit at The Children's Hospital at Westmead, began during the H1N1 Influenza outbreak in 2009 and found that not only were immunisation rates low among children but complications from influenza were high.

Selected based on the significance of the research to the community and the strength of the science, the project used the Paediatric Active Enhanced Disease Surveillance (PAEDS) to collect and analyse the data from children admitted to hospital with influenza and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

The PAEDS system is run from The Children's Hospital at Westmead by the Australian Paediatric Surveillance Unit and National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance.

Data were collected from 601 patients under 15 from four Australian states during the H1N1 pandemic to determine the impact of the disease on the community and hospitals, the management of the disease as well as the outcomes for the children.

The researchers concluded that achieving higher vaccination rates would be an important step in lowering the rate of infection, admission and complications from influenza. Also, they suggest that in cases of proven influenza, antiviral agents should be used more readily and early in the infection.

The PAEDS system, established in 2007 and currently based in five Australian hospitals, was a key tool in allowing Professor Elliott and her fellow researchers to understand the pattern and nature of influenza in the community.

Since completing the project Professor Elliot has received additional support to expand the PAEDS system to enable research into other infectious diseases.

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