

Media Release



The Sydney
children's
Hospitals Network

care, advocacy, research, education

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Parents urged to get children vaccinated as flu hospitalisations rise

Parents are urged to vaccinate children six months and over against influenza, following a sharp increase in the number of children admitted to hospital wards and intensive care units (ICUs) with the flu.

Dr Matthew O'Meara, Chief Paediatrician and Emergency Physician said this year's flu season has come early, with close to 700 children admitted to the Sydney Children's Hospitals Network (SCHN) for care since April.

"Flu can be very serious in children. While most cases are typically mild, 23 children have needed care in the ICU so far this year, with some experiencing serious complications such as severe chest infections, altered consciousness, seizures and heart inflammation," Dr O'Meara said.

"At SCHN, we are seeing approximately four times as many children admitted to hospital with flu than with COVID-19."

The influenza vaccine is free for everyone aged six months and over in NSW until 17 July at GPs and pharmacies. Vaccination for children under five years is only available at GPs.

"Only about one in five eligible NSW children have received their influenza jab this year and we really need to see that number go up. There is plenty of stock available at pharmacies and GPs and it's not too late to get vaccinated," said Dr O'Meara.

"Babies and immunocompromised children are particularly vulnerable to respiratory illnesses like flu, so now is the time to get the jab. If your baby is under six months of age and therefore too young to have the flu vaccine, the best way to protect them is by getting everyone in their family fully vaccinated."

With other viral infections like bronchiolitis also on the rise, accessing the right care at the right time is key to keeping children safe and healthy this winter.

"Parents should be on alert for symptoms of flu this winter. Most symptoms like cough, runny nose or fever can be safely managed at home with plenty of fluids, rest and pain relief like paracetamol or ibuprofen to bring down a fever," said Dr O'Meara.

"If parents are worried, they should contact their GP or use [Healthdirect's](#) 24-hour hotline for practical health advice. If your child has severe difficulty breathing, chest pain or seizures, call Triple Zero (000)."

Little things can make a big difference when it comes to curbing the spread of viruses this winter. Everyone can help reduce the risk to themselves and others by:

- staying home if unwell, taking a COVID-19 test straight away and self-isolating
- wearing a mask indoors or wherever it is difficult to physically distance
- getting together outdoors or in large, well-ventilated spaces with open doors and windows

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- practising good hygiene by washing or sanitising our hands often
- taking a rapid antigen test for COVID-19 before visiting vulnerable loved ones or going to large gatherings and events
- staying up to date with vaccinations – for both flu and COVID-19.

For information on flu vaccination, visit www.nsw.gov.au/vaccination

For general advice on caring for kids this winter, visit www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/winter

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