

ARE YOU READY FOR WINTERS WOES?



Prepare yourself for winter with the flu vaccination

In Sydney's north, mother of two from Riverview, Carolina Posadas, and 81-year-old resident from Neutral Bay, June Campbell, know all too well about the importance of getting a flu vaccination in preparation for winter.

Young children and the elderly are at the highest risk of becoming seriously ill from the flu.

In severe cases, this can result in ending up in a hospital with complications which may lead to pneumonia or in the worst cases, a fatality.

Dr Liz Swinburn, an emergency specialist at Royal North Shore Hospital, says, "Under 12 months and over 85-years-old are the age groups most affected. They end up being admitted more than other age groups into hospital emergency departments during the flu season. The problem is that because the flu is mostly mild in otherwise well adults it is easy for them to pass it on to their kids and elderly parents."

Argentinian born mother of two Carolina has been an Australian citizen for 14 years. Carolina says her children have always been healthy in the flu season because they have always had a flu vaccination.

Carolina says that as a working woman herself, with a husband who works full time, and two school- aged children, the main benefits of getting the flu vaccination are, "that you don't really get sick. Our children have never had the flu because we always vaccinate. And you don't make other people sick because the flu is so contagious and can spread so quickly. I also work with children in my job as a Spanish teacher, and my children go to day-care, so we can't afford to be flu carriers and spread it around."

This is not the case for all children in the community.

"Last year because I had my children vaccinated, when over half of their school class had the flu, neither of them got sick. We all try to make our children as healthy as possible by feeding them the right food and making sure they get enough rest. But diseases exist even if your children are healthy.



Dr Liz Swinburn
Emergency specialist
Royal North Shore Hospital

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Mother of two and Spanish teacher

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Dr Harry Nespolon

Neutral Bay GP
Chair of SNPHN

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They are also surrounded by other children and adults that might be sick, and viruses and bacteria's can be picked-up everywhere. And they are children so they won't always be doing things like washing their hands before they eat. So, it is really worth it to vaccinate your little ones,” says Carolina.

Dr Liz Swinburn supports Carolina's view, “Get immunised! If your workplace provides free immunisations, ask them if your partner can get the vaccination as well. If he or she gets sick and can't look after the kids, then you will need time off work, so it's a win-win for the employer. If you are unwell, use good hand hygiene and cover your mouth when coughing and sneezing. Try not to be in close contact with the young or old if you are sick, even if you are not that unwell.”

“If you get the flu then you can get very sick and make your children and workmates sick.

As a parent, having a child who's sick means that you have to stay at home because you want to take care of them. But that means you can't go to work

and that has an impact on family life and other responsibilities,” says Carolina.

Neutral Bay resident June Campbell, at 81 years old, understands the importance of staying well over the flu season at her age.

“I think there is compelling evidence to show that without getting the flu vaccine we could become very ill and finish up as a statistic. I don't want to end up in hospital on a ventilator like some of my friends have. I think it is also very unfair to your family, friends and neighbours not to have a flu injection because you could be spreading your germs onto them,” says June.

“I had the flu before the flu vaccine became available and I was really sick. I mean really ill! So, I have had the flu jab every year it has been available ever since then. For older people who do things like ride public transport or attend events, people don't bother covering their mouths half the time when they cough or sneeze during flu season and even when they do someone like me is still more susceptible to picking up all the germs that are around. As an older person over 65 where the flu vaccination is free, you are foolish not to get it because the life you save could be your own,” June continues.

Neutral Bay general practitioner and Chair of the Sydney North Primary Health Network Dr Harry Nespolon says, “The treatment of influenza is not as robust as the prevention. Antivirals or antibiotics can sometimes make a patient with the flu more comfortable, but prevention by getting your flu vaccination is really the key.”



June Campbell
81-year-old Neutral Bay resident

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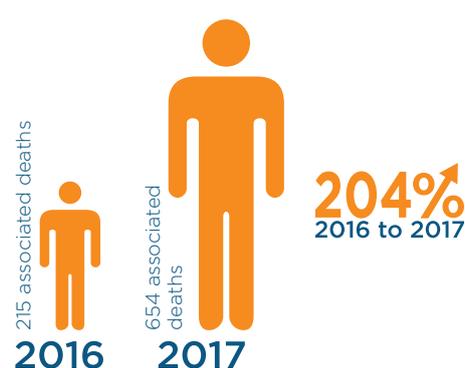
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FLU IN NORTHERN SYDNEY

In 2017 reported cases of the flu more than doubled from 2016



FLU IN NSW

Influenza-associated deaths increased by 204%

- ✓ Older people (Aged 65+ years)
- ✓ Pregnant women (at any stage of pregnancy)
- ✓ Children aged 6 months to 5 years
- ✓ Indigenous people aged 15+ years
- ✓ People with certain medical conditions (Please check with your GP)

FREE FLU VACCINATIONS

From April 2018 more people are eligible for free flu vaccination

“Some people are concerned about how effective the flu vaccination really is. Last year there were large numbers of people who got the flu despite getting a vaccination. Like all vaccinations, the flu vac is not perfect. However, there needs to be higher levels of community vaccinations to stop the flu being spread. As a society there needs to be no doubt that the people who get their vaccinations are much better off than the people who don’t,” says Dr Nespolon.

Last year, in 2017, the impact of the flu on Northern Sydney (Northern Sydney Local Health District) residents was pronounced, with reported cases more than doubling, as recorded in [NSW Health’s infectious diseases data on influenza](#). The region had a 128% increase in total influenza notifications, numbering 14,619 residents compared to 2016’s 6,408 residents.

The flu’s fatal characteristic is also illustrated by NSW’s number of reported influenza-associated deaths. In 2017 there were 654 influenza-associated deaths, representing a 204% increase on 2016’s 215 reported influenza-associated deaths (NSW Health, Communicable Diseases, Influenza Monthly Epidemiology Report, December 2017 and 2016).

From April 2018 in NSW, children between six months and under five years old will be eligible for free influenza vaccinations. The NSW Government is investing another \$3.5 million into the state’s \$19.5 million vaccination program.

Under Australian Government funding, older Australians over 65 and pregnant women can already access the flu vaccine for free under the National Immunisation Program.

To read more or for further information on the flu vaccination visit our website www.snhn.org.au.