

Friday 13 July 2018

Free flu vaccination gives vital protection for children

NSW Health has again urged parents to vaccinate their children against flu, after one child died and another 18 children were recently admitted to a Sydney hospital.

Dr Kerry Chant, NSW Chief Health Officer, said from 3 April to 8 July this year 19 children were admitted to The Children's Hospital at Westmead, 17 of whom contracted influenza A (H1N1).

"We know that 15 of the children were eligible for the free flu vaccine but only two of them had been fully vaccinated against flu," Dr Chant said.

"This is an important reminder to parents who have not yet vaccinated their children that influenza can be life-threatening and it's not too late to vaccinate.

"Flu case numbers across the state are starting to rise and influenza A (H1N1), which mostly strikes children and young adults, is the key strain circulating in the community.

"Sadly, we have received the first report this year a child has died from influenza A."

NSW Health's latest [Influenza Surveillance Weekly Report](#) showed 256 confirmed flu cases for the week ending 8 July, markedly less than the 6,449 cases reported in the same week in 2017, but higher than the previous week's 178. The confirmed cases represent only a proportion of influenza activity in the community, but they are an indication the flu season will start later than usual this year.

Dr Chant said almost all of the 256 confirmed flu cases contracted influenza A (H1N1), which caused the 2009 pandemic.

"There are plentiful supplies of the free flu vaccination for under-fives, just call ahead to your GP to check they have it in stock or give them time to order more vaccines."

The NSW Government is spending a record \$22.75 million on state-wide immunisation programs which will assist with flu prevention this season. This includes \$3.5 million for free flu shots to children up to five years of age and a \$1.75 million immunisation and influenza prevention campaign.

The flu vaccine is also free under the National Immunisation Program for those who are pregnant, Aboriginal, aged 65 years or more, or have medical conditions such as severe asthma, diabetes and heart problems.

"Vaccination is the best protection against flu but you can also help prevent it spreading by coughing and sneezing into your elbow, cleaning your hands regularly and staying home when sick," Dr Chant said.

The Influenza Surveillance Weekly Reports can be viewed on the NSW Health [website](#).

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