



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

Dear Colleague

Seasonal Influenza Vaccination

I am writing to you to provide detail on the expanded eligibility for seasonal influenza vaccination announced by Minister Roxon last year and to discuss the best use of the two influenza vaccines available this winter. The seasonal influenza vaccine contains the pandemic (H1N1) influenza antigen, influenza B and an updated H3N2.

The expanded eligibility for free seasonal influenza vaccine under the National Immunisation Program now includes everyone 65 years and over, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over, all pregnant women and all those 6 months of age and over with medical conditions listed in the enclosed Fact Sheet. Vaccination of these groups is recommended even if they have had a pandemic (H1N1) vaccine dose. Since seasonal influenza vaccine will be available free for the expanded groups above, it will no longer be available on the PBS. Limited supplies will be available for private purchase for others who wish to access seasonal influenza vaccine.

For Australians not covered by the above groups, as you know, free pandemic (H1N1) influenza vaccine is also available. Our experience in last year's outbreak was that pandemic (H1N1) influenza preferentially attacked younger people, causing more hospitalisations and significantly more ICU admissions than seasonal influenza. Further, in the USA in December 2009 almost all influenza for those under 65 years was pandemic (H1N1) influenza. Although there is uncertainty about how much influenza B and H3N2 may circulate here this winter, it is likely that H1N1 will be the predominant strain.

In summary, seasonal influenza vaccine is available free for an expanded group of Australians or may be available for purchase commercially. The pandemic (H1N1) influenza vaccine is also available free and could be used especially for younger people and those without specified medical conditions.

This winter, with the vaccines we now have available, we may be able to substantially limit influenza and its negative impact on our population and our health system. I recommend that you consider offering vaccination to a wide range of patients in your practice with these vaccines.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Bishop'.

Professor Jim Bishop AO
MD MMed MBBS FRACP FRCPA
24 March 2010