



## **EARLY FLU VACCINE WILL PROTECT PATIENTS AND TAKE PRESSURE OFF HEALTH SERVICES AMID COVID-19 CRISIS**

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said the current and somewhat early roll out of this year's free influenza vaccination for eligible patients should send a strong message to the whole community that it is time to get immunised and protect their health.

Dr Bartone said Australians are rightly and clearly extremely worried about COVID-19 at the moment, but influenza remains a very serious illness, particularly for vulnerable members of the community.

"Each year, thousands of Australians are admitted to hospitals with influenza complications, with around a thousand Australians dying from influenza in each of the past few years," Dr Bartone said.

"More than a quarter of a million cases of influenza were officially diagnosed last year. There is no real treatment for influenza, with antivirals limiting the course of illness mildly.

"People who get the influenza vaccine now will be better protected from the serious prospect of having both COVID-19 and influenza at the same time.

"Influenza vaccine is the only safe, proven, and tested way of not becoming an influenza statistic.

"The influenza virus changes each year, which is another reason yearly administration of the latest season's new four strain vaccine is necessary.

"Your family GP is best placed to advise you on the different formulations and the one that is most appropriate for you.

"Not only will you avoid as much as a week or more of significant illness including fever, aches, muscle pains, feeling extremely unwell, and needing time off work - you will also avoid having to seek care in the middle of one of the most critical health crises in living memory.

"Governments are encouraging people to stay at home during this pandemic, but that does not mean you cannot pay a visit to your GP to get vaccinated.

"Vaccination is an absolutely essential service, particularly for patients who are older or who have chronic illness.

"Because of the risks of the transmission of COVID-19, many general practices have different systems and arrangements in place this year to ensure patients are protected. They are prioritising access and processes to ensure accelerated administration of the vaccine this year.

"As stocks of vaccination might take a few days to arrive in some locations, it is important that people ring the general practice before making an appointment to make sure that supplies of the influenza vaccine have arrived.

“Ideally, patients should get vaccinated from mid-April, but in these uncertain times with Covid-19 affecting our daily lives, people should not feel that they have to wait. Indeed, now is the perfect time to book that appointment as we head into a long and uncertain winter.

“If we can protect as many people as possible from getting the flu this flu season, the better the chance that we can keep the pressure off our hospitals and other health services, which are dealing with Covid-19 and the normal business of keeping Australians fit and healthy.

“With so many hundreds of thousands of Australians currently laid off from their jobs, the opportunity for workplace immunisations will be drastically reduced.

“This ultimately means that more Australians than ever will potentially be not immunised at the start of another influenza season.

“This could prove deadly for our community as a whole, but especially for the most vulnerable.

“The message is simple: get your flu vaccine now.

“Influenza never takes a holiday. We should not let our guard down against a familiar and proven enemy at any time. This year, especially, is no exception.,” Dr Bartone said.

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