Flu vaccine reminder

Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent flu and its debilitating symptoms and people should head to their GP now for a quick, painless jab, says a local health expert.

Sydney Local Health District (SLHD) Director of Public Health, Dr Stephen Conaty, said influenza affected thousands of people across NSW each year, and could lead to complications including pneumonia, bronchitis, heart failure or the worsening of pre-existing chronic conditions.

“It is particularly important for people at an increased risk of severe illness from the flu to be vaccinated and to seek medical attention if they develop symptoms,” Dr Conaty said.

“Those most at risk include adults aged over 65, pregnant women, people with underlying chronic medical conditions including heart and lung disease, HIV, asthma or diabetes and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

Dr Conaty strongly recommended that pregnant women who would be in their second or third trimester during winter receive the flu shot, as they were at higher risk of severe flu or complications from flu if they developed the flu virus.

Vaccinating against flu during pregnancy also provided protection for the baby during their first vulnerable months of life.

“It can take up to two weeks for the body to develop full immunity, so autumn is the perfect time to be vaccinated before the winter flu season begins,” Dr Conaty said.

“Influenza is caused by a virus that spreads easily from person to person through infected droplets in the air and by hands carrying the virus. It is much more serious than the common cold.

“The flu vaccine does not contain a live virus; therefore it is impossible for people to contract the flu after receiving the vaccine.

“Although some people may experience mild side effects from the flu vaccine, such as pain and swelling at the injection site, mild fever and muscles aches; severe allergic reactions to the vaccine are rare,” he said.
If you do experience flu symptoms, it is recommended you stay at home until you are better.

If you develop severe symptoms, see your doctor.

It is important to cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue and wash your hands afterwards.

“Pregnant women may experience the same side effects as others; however, there is no evidence that the vaccine harms the developing baby,” Dr Conaty said.

The flu vaccine is available free of charge to adults over the age of 65 years, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over, pregnant women, or to a person with any chronic illness predisposing to severe influenza. Your GP may charge a consultation fee.

Flu symptoms include:

- fever
- headache
- muscle and joint pain
- sore throat
- cough
- runny or stuffy nose
- severe tiredness