

Under embargo until 6th April 2017, 1.00 am

GPs play an important role, when consumers say: #HitMeWithYourBestShot!

Australia's leading voice in whole-of-life immunisation introduces the 2017 GP Guide for Influenza while launching the annual flu vaccination awareness campaign.

6 April 2017, Melbourne - The Immunisation Coalition, Australia's leading voice in whole-of-life-immunisation, has announced the launch of its #HitMeWithYourBestShot consumer campaign today.

The Immunisation Coalition urges GPs to play an active role to help bring down flu rates across the country to protect Australians and those most at risk. Paul Van Buynder, Chairman of the Immunisation Coalition invited GPs to play an active role in advocating for the flu shot 'Only 36% of people 18-64 years old with underlying medical conditions get the annual flu shot to protect themselves from serious and potentially life threatening complications from influenza'.

Australians are invited to actively join the campaign by uploading their image on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter using the hash tag #HitMeWithYourBestShot, bringing awareness to the benefits of being protected and challenging their friends and family to do the same.

The influenza vaccine for 2017 will be made available to GPs from mid-April.

Professor Robert Booy, Director of the Immunisation Coalition, explains that supplying vaccine in April to GPs will increase protection for elderly patients: "Research suggests there is an increased likelihood in the at-risk age group over 65 that the immune response decreases after three or four months. If these patients are vaccinated in April-May, the protection should last through the peak flu period of July-August."

In 2016, 90,861 Australians suffered from laboratory confirmed influenza, with many more cases going undiagnosed. These figures only represent the tip of the iceberg but throughout 2016:

- 10% of influenza patients who had to go to hospital were admitted directly into the ICU
- 74% of hospitalised sufferers belonged to the group most at risk of complications from influenza
- It is estimated that approximately 2.3 million Australians aged 35-64 have underlying medical conditions that put them at high risk of severe complications from influenza.

The Immunisation Coalition recognises the importance of increasing vaccination rates in pregnant women.

"Vaccinating Pregnant Women against influenza gives a 3 for 1 benefit", explains Paul Van Buynder, 'The flu shot protects during pregnancy when women are likely to get very severe disease, it decreases the chances of losing the baby and harming growth in utero during pregnancy, and it protects babies in the early months of life by transferring antibodies in utero. Babies are then protected when they are very young and can't be vaccinated themselves but are at risk of severe disease.' It is safe for women to get the flu vaccination at any stage of the pregnancy.

The Immunisation Coalition also recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as an important risk group. Those aged 6months to <5 years and greater than 15 are entitled to free vaccine under the National Immunisation Program.

The Immunisation Coalition calls for all GPs to talk to their patients about vaccination at any stage of their life.

Free influenza vaccine is available under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for people in the following risk groups:

- Older Australians (65+)
- Indigenous Australians (6months to <5 years and 15+)
- Pregnant women
- People aged 6months + with medical conditions that can lead to complications from influenza
 - Severe Asthma
 - Lung or Heart disease
 - Chronic neurological disease
 - Renal and metabolic disease
 - Impaired immunity

The 2017 Influenza Guide for GPs can be downloaded here:

<http://www.immunisationcoalition.org.au/resources/influenza/>

The Guide for Healthcare Providers on Influenza and Pregnancy can be downloaded here:

<http://www.immunisationcoalition.org.au/resources/influenza-pregnancy/>

For more information please visit <http://www.flusmart.org.au> or www.immunisationcoalition.org.au

join the conversation at <https://www.facebook.com/immunisationcoalition/> and Twitter

<https://twitter.com/immunisationgap>

The Immunisation Coalition strongly supports annual vaccination of all those at risk of complications from influenza and of anyone over 6 months of age wishing to avoid infection.

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About Immunisation Coalition

The Immunisation Coalition is a not for profit advocacy group with a mission to create awareness about the importance of immunisation.

Immunisation still provides the best protection against infectious diseases. We work with consumers, health professionals and organisations with an interest in immunisation and government health agencies, ensuring that the information provided to consumers through our website and other communication channels is current, easily understood and scientifically informed.