

MEDIA RELEASE Embargo until 17.04.2018, 11.00am

Experts concerned about Australians being exposed this Flu Season. Latest survey shows: less than half of Australian adults intend to get a flu shot this year!

The National Immunisation Program provides free influenza vaccine for the elderly, as well as other high-risk groups including pregnant women, those with chronic diseases and Indigenous Australians 15 years and over from this week. But without achieving vaccination rates of 80%, vulnerable people in the community may be exposed to the potentially deadly disease.

Australia's leading voice in whole-of-life immunisation, the Immunisation Coalition publishes the latest Survey results today with a call to action: Australians need to get the flu shot not only for their own protection but also to reduce the spread of influenza to vulnerable people, including pregnant women #HitMeWithYourBestShot

17. March 2018, Melbourne – While the flu vaccine may not provide a 100% guarantee of not being infected with the flu, it is nevertheless more important than you think. The latest Immunisation Coalition survey shows that 35% of adults would get this year's flu shot if they knew it had been updated to better match the circulating viruses.

Kim Sampson, CEO of the Immunisation Coalition explains why it is worth getting the flu shot: 'All influenza vaccines available in Australia this year have been updated to better protect against the circulating virus strains!'

People who get vaccinated are at lower risk of contracting influenza than those who are not. They are less likely to be laid up in bed with sweats, shivers and muscle aches, and take time off work or their usual activities, or to be hospitalised with complications. Kim Sampson wants to be clear: If you are vaccinated, you're less likely to get the flu. But that's not the whole story!

If you are healthy, your decision is about considering the cost for the flu shot and a few moments of discomfort against the possibility that you'll need to take time off work and endure days of misery due to infection.

But, you should not just think about yourself! The decision to get vaccinated is about evaluating the risk that you can pass the flu on to someone who is at risk of serious illness from infection, even before you are aware that you have the flu. For vulnerable people – such as the elderly, young children, pregnant women or people with underlying medical conditions – the flu can be the difference between being at home or being in hospital with complications such as bacterial pneumonia, which can put their life at risk.

Australian studies generally estimate that the risk of influenza is reduced by about 40-50% in people who receive the vaccine. And while this might seem low, reducing the risk of infection by half is worth the effort! The Immunisation Coalition recommends getting a flu shot in April or early May, as it takes two weeks for the body to build immunity and the effect usually lasts for 6-8 months.

Last year saw not only 250,000 cases of laboratory confirmed flu but also 1,100 Australians died from influenza complications. And the flu does not discriminate - it affects people of all ages, and infections among the elderly are more likely to require hospitalisation, or cause serious complications such as pneumonia and heart attacks.

The Immunisation Coalition's mission is to reduce the public health impact of vaccine preventable diseases in Australia, and recommends for everyone older than 6 months to get



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vaccinated against influenza. You can check here if you are eligible for a free flu shot: <http://www.immunisationcoalition.org.au/immunisation/whos-at-risk/>

For more information please visit: www.immunisationcoalition.org.au

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

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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.

Facts from the 2018 Immunisation Coalition Survey ¹

- Intention of having a flu shot: Yes 44%, No 56%
- Women 55+ have the highest intention of having a flu shot: 74%
- Woman in full-time employment: 68% intend to have a flu shot.
- 64% of parents of school aged children intend to get the flu shot
- Middle aged men (35-45) in regional and rural Australia have the lowest intention of getting a flu shot: only 27% have intentions to get a flu shot.
- Men are more sceptical and believe that the flu vaccine does not work (57% of responses from men compared to 43% from women) - particularly men aged 55-64 where 59% mentioned this.
- Australians with an income of less than \$50,000 in regional and rural areas are the second lowest segment of the population intending to get the influenza vaccine: only 31%.
- And only 36% of young men 18-34 intend to get the flu shot
- 35% would get this year's flu shot if they knew it has been updated to better match the mutated virus.
- Only 27% of Australian adults get a flu shot every year.
- 43% of the adult population "Do not believe the flu shot works"
- 24% do not think it is important.
- 18% do not "believe in unnecessary vaccines"

1, Healthcare and Medical Research Study, Attitudes to Flu Vaccination, Australian general Population, Immunisation Coalition, April 2018

Sample: National, representative sample with interviews undertaken in all capital cities, main regional cities and a large number of rural towns. Over 15,000 respondents. Survey conducted by APMI partners.