



**Brad Hazzard**  
Minister for Health

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **STAY SAFE THIS WINTER, GET YOUR FLU SHOT NOW**

NSW residents are being urged to book in for their flu vaccine without delay, with winter just a week away and hospitals already seeing a surge in influenza cases.

Health Minister Brad Hazzard said NSW hospitals are facing a triple threat with high numbers of COVID-19 cases, a surge in flu cases and staff furloughing due to illness.

“NSW Health has been warning us for months of the likelihood of a horror flu season, so please, help yourselves and our health staff and get a flu shot,” Mr Hazzard said.

“After two years of COVID, our hospitals do not need the added challenge of avoidable influenza, when flu shots are readily available at GPs and pharmacies.

“With almost no exposure to flu these past two years, it is imperative we all get a flu jab to protect ourselves and the community.”

NSW’s Chief Paediatrician Dr Matt O’Meara said there is particular concern for children aged six months to five years old.

“We are encouraging parents to be alert this flu season as young children are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of flu,” Dr O’Meara said.

“At least 10 per cent of children admitted to hospital with flu will be so sick that they need intensive care. Parents can reduce the risk of that happening, just by getting their child vaccinated.”

Those considered to be at higher risk of severe illness from influenza are eligible for a free flu vaccine. This includes children from six months to under five years of age; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from six months of age; people with serious health conditions, pregnant women, and people aged 65 and over.

NSW Health Secretary Susan Pearce said emergency departments across NSW are currently under significant pressure due to high numbers of COVID-19 cases and now a surge in flu cases, which is impacting the availability of staff.

“Our wonderful frontline healthcare workers are here to help give you the right care if you need it. If you are seriously injured, seriously unwell or have a life-threatening medical emergency, you should call triple zero or attend an emergency department without delay,” Ms Pearce said.

“We are urging the community to support us during this challenging period by making sure those who need emergency medical care can receive it by saving ambulances and emergency departments for saving lives. Please do not call triple zero or attend emergency departments for non-urgent issues.”

If you are not sure if you should go to an emergency department, visit [Healthdirect.gov.au](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au) or call Healthdirect for free on 1800 022 222 for fast, expert advice on what to do next. Healthdirect is a 24-hour telephone health advice line staffed by registered nurses. You can also get in touch with your GP for advice and support.

So far this year in NSW, there have been 14,812 reported flu cases and 3,349 people have presented to emergency departments with influenza-like illness.

NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant urged the community to continue to do the little things that can make a big difference when it comes to curbing the spread of viruses this winter.

“It is important people continue to take simple precautions to protect themselves and each other. This includes wearing a mask indoors when you can’t physically distance, staying at home when you’re unwell, and remembering to practise good hand hygiene,” Dr Chant said.

We can help reduce the COVID-19 and flu risk to ourselves and others by:

- Staying home if we’re unwell, taking a COVID-19 test straight away and self-isolating.
- Wearing a mask indoors or wherever we can’t physically distance
- Getting together outdoors or in large, well-ventilated spaces with open doors and windows
- Practising good hygiene by washing or sanitising our hands often
- Taking a rapid antigen test to test for COVID-19 before visiting vulnerable loved ones or going to large gatherings and events
- Staying up to date with our vaccinations – for both flu and COVID-19.

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