



Centre for Disease Control

NT HEALTH

Public Health Alert

Issued: 9 August 2024
Issued by: Director, Centre for Disease Control
Issued to: All clinicians

Dear Colleagues

Increase in influenza

Summary

There has been a marked increase in influenza notifications in the Top End in the last 2 weeks with 197 cases reported, which is a 34% increase compared to the previous fortnight. Most notifications have come from the Darwin region, particularly in urban areas. It is expected that cases will increase across other NT regions in the coming weeks.

Notifications have been observed across all age groups with 29% being infants, children, and adolescents. About one third of cases are in Aboriginal people. Almost all notifications have been influenza A. To be protected, people need to be vaccinated now with the 2024 flu vaccine. It is not too late for the 2024 influenza vaccine, in fact, much of the season lies ahead.

Take advantage of opportunistic vaccinating and let your patients know that it is time for an influenza vaccination and offer the influenza vaccine when they attend.

Health services in Royal Darwin Hospital and Palmerston Regional Hospital are experiencing very high numbers of presentations to the Emergency Department and hospital admissions with to influenza-like illnesses (ILI). Be alert for cases of influenza and ILI in your community, promote vaccination, and encourage behaviours that minimise transmission of respiratory viruses.

Further national surveillance information is also available [here](#).

The strategy for flu control - *Vaccinate. Test. Treat. Prevent*

- **Vaccinate** everyone over 6 months, but in particular those eligible for free vaccine as deemed at higher risk. This year's flu vaccine is now available. See [here](#) for more information. Offer the vaccine as a matter-of-course to all those over 6 months of age.
- **Test** cases of influenza-like illness (ILI) for flu, COVID, and RSV. This includes sending to the lab for testing if it is not available at point of care. ILI is defined as an acute respiratory illness with symptoms including fever and cough.
- **Treat** suspect flu cases with antivirals for flu if they are high risk, moderately unwell or deteriorating and evaluate COVID-19 cases for anti-virals if indicated.
- **Prevent spread** by promoting the use of masks in symptomatic people and using personal protective equipment (PPE). Isolate cases and promote hand hygiene, social distancing and cough etiquette.

Centre for Disease Control
Public Health Division

 (08) 8922 8044 or 1800 008 002
 CDCSurveillance.DARWIN@nt.gov.au

Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine 2024

Age	Vaccine Brand
6 months to 64 years	Fluarix Tetra® 0.5ml or Vaxigrip® Tetra 0.5ml
65 years and older	Fluad® Quad 0.5ml

Actions

Vaccinate

Please keep offering Influenza vaccine all year round. Flu vaccine coverage in the NT for those 6 months to < 5 years is only 25% and for those 65 years and older is < 50%. Flu vaccine can be given at the same time as other vaccines including COVID-19 and pneumococcal vaccines.

Who is eligible for the funded (free) influenza vaccine?

- Adults ≥ 65 years of age (recommended Fluad® Quad)
- All children aged 6 months to less than 5 years
- Aboriginal people aged 6 months and over
- All people aged 6 months and over with a medical condition increasing the risk of severe influenza and its complications. See [here](#) for a list of medical conditions
- Pregnant women in all trimesters

Test

All patients presenting with ILI should be tested for influenza, COVID, and RSV using a nose/throat swab. Send to the lab if not available at point of care (POC). Follow the current advice regarding testing for other respiratory illnesses.

Treat

Antivirals such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) reduce morbidity and symptoms of influenza and are indicated for people with suspected influenza based on clinical, laboratory or epidemiological grounds. Further information on oseltamivir is available on the NT Centre for Disease Control [factsheet](#).

Prevent spread

All respiratory infections are contagious and have the potential to cause serious illness, particularly in the vulnerable. Any person who has acute respiratory symptoms should not attend childcare, school or work and should wear a surgical mask in the public setting. When attending a health care facility they should be seated at least 1.5 metres away from other patients, or preferably in a separate area from other patients. Health staff consulting patients with possible ILI should wear an N95 mask, gloves, gown and eye protection and perform hand hygiene prior to and following each patient care encounter.

Yours sincerely

Dr Vicki Krause

Director, Centre for Disease Control, Public Health Division, NT Health

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