

Postal address
GPO Box 40596
Casuarina, NT, 0811

ECDCSurveillance.DARWIN@nt.gov.au

T 08 8922 8044

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Dear Colleague,

Flu has arrived

Seasonal influenza has arrived in the Northern Territory (NT). This is the first time significant numbers of laboratory-confirmed cases have been notified since early 2020. There have been over 300 laboratory-confirmed cases notified since the end of March compared to 76 for the whole of 2021. The cases are mainly in urban Darwin, urban Alice Springs and remote Central Australian communities with about 60% being Aboriginal. It seems to be mainly affecting middle-aged adults and is a mixture of H1N1 and H3N2.

The 2022 flu season has the potential to be severe, with respect to both spread and severity. Due to historically low numbers in recent years there is likely to be low levels of herd immunity among the NT population. In addition, the flu viruses have had longer to mutate and will be a lot different from those of the last major outbreak in 2019. It is important to be alert for cases of influenza in your community and to promote vaccination.

Further national surveillance information is 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.
- **Test** cases of influenza-like illness* (ILI) for flu and COVID.
- **Treat** suspect flu cases with antivirals for flu if they are high risk, moderately unwell or deteriorating.
- **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.

Vaccinate

Influenza vaccine is now available and can be given at the same time, or any time before or after, any of the COVID-19 vaccines.

Who is eligible for the funded influenza vaccine?

- Adults \geq 65 years of age.
- 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.

Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine 2022	
Age	Vaccine Brand
6 months to 64 years of age	Fluarix Tetra® 0.5ml or Vaxigrip® Tetra 0.5ml
65 years and older	Fluad® Quad 0.5ml

Test

All patient presenting with the above symptoms should be tested for influenza and COVID. Follow the current advice regarding testing for respiratory illnesses.

Treat

Antivirals such as oseltamivir (Tamiflu) reduce morbidity and symptoms and are indicated for people with influenza-like illness who might have flu based on clinical 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.

Please contact your regional Centre for Disease Control for further advice.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Vicki Krause, Director
Director Centre for Disease Control – Environmental Health

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Darwin	89228044	Katherine	89739041	Nhulunbuy	89870357
Tennant Creek	89324259	Alice Springs	89517540		