

Media Release

The Hon Martin Foley MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services
Minister for Equality



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PHARMACISTS JOIN THE CHILDREN FLU VACCINE ROLLOUT

With the flu on the rise for the first time in three years, the Andrews Labor Government is helping families stay safe this winter by making it easier for kids to get their annual flu vaccine.

Community pharmacists across Victoria can now administer the seasonal flu vaccine to anyone aged 5 years and over – taking pressure off our GPs and boosting the number of vaccine providers by 600.

While Victoria's flu season usually runs from April to September, more than 6,400 cases of influenza have already been reported this year – with the highest numbers seen in children and young adults aged between 5 and 24.

The number of reported cases is already far more than those recorded in the past two years. In 2020, there were 4,792 reported cases for the whole year, while in 2021 there were just 110 known cases.

Public health experts believe two years of low influenza infection rates coupled with the reopening of international borders and reintroduction of influenza into the community could result in high infection rates this year.

Victoria's community pharmacists already have significant experience vaccinating young children aged 5 to 11, who became eligible for their first COVID-19 vaccination in January this year.

Authorising pharmacists to administer flu vaccines to children aged 5 and over draws on this highly trained, skilled and experienced workforce and is the next logical step in Victoria's winter preparedness action plan.

The changes will also see Victoria become the first state to allow pharmacists and nurse immunisers to administer the Japanese Encephalitis (JE) vaccine to eligible Victorians, which they previously had not been able to. This will increase access and ease pressure on regional GPs in JE virus-affected areas.

With winter approaching, there is no better time to get vaccinated against the flu and COVID-19. Both vaccines can be safely administered at the same time – making it quick and easy to protect yourself and your loved ones.

The cold weather also serves as a timely reminder to make sure your child is up to date with their vaccinations. More than 87,000 children aged 5 to 11 are now overdue for their second COVID-19 vaccine.

With COVID-19 and influenza circulating in the community, anyone with cold and flu symptoms should get tested for COVID-19 and remain at home until their symptoms have resolved. People who test positive for COVID-19 must stay at home for seven days from the date of their result.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

"This will be the first time in two years, that Victoria will face a real flu season – this change is about making it even easier for busy mums and dads to get their kids vaccinated from the flu."

"So next time you're at your pharmacy, roll up your sleeve and get vaccinated against the flu, it not only protects you but also those around you."

"Help your family stay safe this winter by getting vaccinated, getting tested if you have any symptoms and staying home while unwell."

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