

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Leader of the House
Minister for Health
Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Ambulance Services



Friday, 7 June 2024

SAVE HOSPITALS AND 000 FOR EMERGENCIES THIS LONG WEEKEND

Victorians should save emergency departments and triple zero for life-threatening emergencies this long weekend as we manage an early season surge in flu and COVID-19 cases.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas today urged people to take advantage of Victoria's range of alternative care options for injuries or illnesses that require urgent attention, but not an emergency response.

The uptick in seasonal respiratory illnesses is significantly increasing demand, with emergency department presentations and Ambulance Victoria Code 1 callouts both well above the 12-month average.

Victoria is also seeing increased COVID-19 hospitalisations – rising to an average of 412 people on any given day last week. Similarly, the number of notified influenza cases has spiked by more than 61 per cent over the past fortnight, with around 96 per cent of these cases diagnosed with Influenza A.

30 per cent of influenza notifications over the last week have been children aged under 10 years – prompting another reminder to parents and carers that it isn't too late to vaccinate.

The flu is highly transmissible and can be a serious for vulnerable people, including children aged six months to five years old – who are most commonly hospitalised for complications from the virus – First Nations Victorians, pregnant women, and those older than 65 years.

Notifications for Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) has also increased around 35 per cent over the past fortnight, with Victorians 60 years and older the highest proportion of those diagnosed.

These increases have prompted renewed calls for Victorians to take advantage of the state's world class urgent care options, with all 29 Priority Primary Care Centres (PPCCs) open across the King's Birthday weekend.

Delivering care at no cost with or without a Medicare card, PPCCs are keeping emergency departments free for critical, life-threatening situations – treating ailments such as broken bones, mild infections and burns.

Open 24/7, the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department (VVED) is also providing a fast and accessible alternative, connecting people with emergency doctors and nurses to deliver safe care in the home.

NURSE-ON-CALL is also available for immediate, expert health advice at any time of the day or night, helping Victorians avoid unnecessary trips to the hospital.

Information on alternative care options can be found via betterhealth.vic.gov.au. For emergency or life-threatening situations, Victorians should call Triple Zero (000) or visit their nearest ED.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"During times of high demand, it is vital we keep our paramedics and EDs available for the sickest and most critically injured Victorians – all non-emergency patients are strongly encouraged to use our free alternative care options."

"It's also a timely reminder that it isn't too late to vaccinate with all Victorians strongly encouraged to consider immunisation against influenza and COVID-19."

"Victorians can also help to reduce the spread of these illnesses by staying home when sick."

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