

MEDIA RELEASE

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SWINE FLU VACCINATION IN THE HANDS OF LOCAL GENERAL PRACTICES

Local general practices will be working to lower the risk of a second wave of swine flu (Influenza H1N1) in Tasmania through the flu vaccination program.

The national swine flu vaccination program begins officially from tomorrow (Wednesday 30 September). The Federal Government has purchased 21 million doses of the swine flu vaccine (Panvax) and a first instalment of the vaccine has now been distributed to general practices in Tasmania.

"The roll-out of the vaccine in Tasmania will be predominantly handled through a patient's regular general practice," said General Practice Tasmania spokesperson Dr Leanne Jones. "With knowledge of their patients' medical history and experience in providing vaccinations, general practices are best placed to determine priority cases and to handle vaccinations as they normally do with the seasonal flu."

The influenza vaccination will be available to anyone over 10 years old who wants to have it, though both the Federal and State Governments are encouraging GPs to ensure health care workers, pregnant women, Indigenous Australians and people with underlying medical conditions are vaccinated as a priority.

"Some general practices will be running flu clinics, offering a block of time where patients can attend to have vaccinations. Others will be managing on a case-by-case basis, and then others will be aiming to target their vulnerable populations first," Dr Jones said.

Patients who want to have the vaccination should contact their regular general practice to discuss their needs. Dr Jones stressed that people may need to be patient as supplies of the vaccine are being delivered to Tasmania in stages. It may be that a patient cannot be vaccinated straight away. "We are working on the basis that the immunisation program will take several months to complete," she said.

Dr Jones noted that the vaccination was very similar to the seasonal flu vaccine and was just as safe. "The company that developed the vaccine is Australian based and has been creating the seasonal influenza vaccine for about 40 years," she said.

Dr Jones also stressed that the vaccination program was vital to avoid a second wave of flu epidemic hitting Australian shores. "While we are seeing flu numbers drop as winter comes to an end, we are aware of increasing cases of H1N1 influenza in the northern hemisphere and the best way to avoid a second wave here is to immunise people against the disease. It's also worth noting that the swine flu epidemic hit the northern hemisphere during its summer, so it may not just be a winter illness," Dr Jones said.

Children under 10 are not able to be vaccinated yet, because the clinical trials on the paediatric version of the vaccine have not been completed. This is expected to happen shortly.

The General Practice Tasmania network will be supporting local GPs and Practice Nurses by providing information and specific guidelines about the vaccination program. We have been working with the State Government to ensure this program runs as smoothly as possible. This is an important role for general practice to ensure the Tasmanian community is protected against further outbreaks of this disease," Dr Jones said.

Ends....

The General Practice Tasmania network is a unique statewide infrastructure that supports contemporary general practice in Tasmania by linking GPs with each other, by supporting all members of the general practice team and, increasingly, by employing or supporting allied health professionals such as physiotherapists, dieticians and psychologists to be part of the primary care team. General Practice Tasmania is also a proud member of the Australian General Practice Network.

