

Flu Season 2018

By Mark Manokaran Nabenet Health – Manager 12th January, 2018

The 2017 influenza season saw the highest levels of reported cases of the flu since the 2009 pandemicⁱ. This effect was greater in the eastern states of Australia which also reported an earlier commencement and prolonged season with an overall 2.5 timesⁱⁱ more confirmed cases of influenza in 2017 when compared with the previous year. Over 370 deaths were also reported in 2017 in particular with increased prevalence amongst the elderly. Health experts reported the reasoning as to the reduced effectiveness and match of the 2017 vaccine in particular to the A(H3N2) strain which was the most common virus in circulation.

The 2017 influenza epidemic also resulted in substantial workplace absenteeism (an average of between 3 to 5 days off workⁱⁱⁱ) and the estimated associated cost of lost productivity was in excess of \$100 million to Australian businesses^{iv}.

What is influenza?

Influenza is not the same as the common cold although the symptoms may be similar. It is caused by a viral infection and the two main basic types of influenza are “A” and “B”. These viruses are seasonal meaning they recur annually during the colder months of the year. The symptoms can be more incapacitating and last much longer than a cold. Influenza thrives in workplace environments and it is estimated to affect 1 in 4 people each season.

How do you get the flu?

The flu virus is an airborne virus which means that it is most predominantly spread through the air when someone coughs or sneezes. You can also catch the flu from touching a contaminated surface with the flu virus on it.

How can the flu be prevented?

Annual influenza vaccination continues to be the most important measure to prevent influenza and its complications. While in some cases, influenza vaccination may not prevent a person developing the disease, it can help to reduce the severity and/or duration of the disease and potentially prevent further serious complications. The World Health Organisation has advised for changes to the 2018 vaccination^v which will now include;

- A/Michigan (H1N1)
- A/Singapore (H3N2) – changed from 2017
- B/Phuket – changed from 2017
- B/Brisbane

The best way to prevent catching the flu is to have the flu vaccination. The vaccination is the most effective way to help the body strengthen its immunity against infection and prevent contracting the flu virus. Other strategies involve good hygiene including covering the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing, washing hands with sanitising soap and avoiding close contact with people who have flu symptoms. If you have the flu, then staying at home from work and limiting contact with other people.

Offering flu vaccinations to staff can;

- Reduce absenteeism
- Reduce lost productivity
- Promote a healthy workforce
- Promote health and wellbeing in the workplace

Contact Nabenet now to book your corporate flu vaccinations program for 2018.

ⁱ Source: <http://www.health.gov.au/flureport> (retrieved 12/1/2018)

ⁱⁱ Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2017-09-28/flu-epidemic-your-questions-answered/8992884> (retrieved 12/1/2018)

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Keech, M. and Beardsworth, P. The impact of influenza on working days lost: a review of the literature. *Pharmacoeconomics* (2008). 26(11): 911-924. (retrieved 12/1/2018)

^{iv} Source: <http://www.news.com.au/finance/work/flu-epidemic-costs-employers-millions-of-dollars-in-lost-productivity/news-story/b9d273ed33ba365007da0421dc7c6477> (retrieved 12/1/2018)

^v Source: <http://www.who.int/influenza/resources/en/> (retrieved 12/1/2018)