Flu Season 2019

By Mark Manokaran Nabenet Health – Manager 11th February, 2019

The 2017 influenza season saw the highest levels of reported cases of the flu since the 2009 pandemic[[1]](#endnote-1). This effect was greater in the eastern states of Australia which also reported an earlier commencement and prolonged season with an overall 2.5 times[[2]](#endnote-2) more confirmed cases of influenza when compared with the previous year. Over 370 deaths were also reported in 2017 in particular with increased prevalence amongst the elderly. The 2017 influenza epidemic also resulted in substantial workplace absenteeism (an average of between 3 to 5 days off work[[3]](#endnote-3)) and the estimated associated cost of lost productivity was in excess of $100 million to Australian businesses[[4]](#endnote-4).

Fortunately, on the back of this disastrous flu season there was increased uptake of the flu vaccination in 2018 (Nabenet Health recorded a 35% increase in vaccinations) and consequently there was a significant reduction in reported cases of the flu – 40,000 in 2018 compared with 230,000 in 2017. Last year the Government also introduced legislation which makes it mandatory for Aged Care services providers to offer the flu vaccination to all staff.

Health experts confirm the reduction in reported cases of the flu was due to a more ‘accurate vaccination’ in 2018, increased public uptake and also the offering of specific vaccinations for at risk groups (those under 5 and over 65 years of age). However, they are warning the public not to be complacent when it comes to taking the flu vaccination again for the 2019 flu season[[5]](#endnote-5).

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 2019 vaccination[[6]](#endnote-6) which will now include;

* A/Michigan/45/2015 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
* A/Switzerland/8060/2017 (H3N2)-like virus; \*CHANGE\*
* B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus (B/Victoria/2/87 lineage); \*CHANGE\*
* B/Phuket/3073/2013-like virus (B/Yamagata/16/88 lineage).

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 2019.

1. Source: <http://www.health.gov.au/flureport> (retrieved 12/1/2018) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2017-09-28/flu-epidemic-your-questions-answered/8992884> (retrieved 12/1/2018) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. 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) [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. 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) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Source: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-06/flu-numbers-drop-by-80-per-cent/10346488> (retrieved 11/2/2019) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Source: https://www.who.int/influenza/vaccines/virus/recommendations/201809\_qanda\_recommendation.pdf?ua=1 (retrieved 11/2/2019) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)