



MEDIA RELEASE

www.influenza.org.nz

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Don't let the flu get you – immunise now

Seasonal influenza ('flu) vaccine has arrived in New Zealand surgeries and this year more groups of New Zealanders will be able to get free flu protection.

The 2010 seasonal influenza vaccine will include protection against three types of flu, including the Pandemic H1N1 Influenza 09 (swine flu).

Director of Public Health Dr Mark Jacobs says people need to be immunised as soon as possible because swine flu may return in a second wave as early as the end of March or early April. It takes up to two weeks to develop immunity after vaccination.

"Although current trends indicate that for most people swine flu is similar to normal winter seasonal flu for some it can be very serious and can lead to complications, even death. We need to be vigilant and take reasonable precautions," says Dr Jacobs.

Influenza or 'flu can be a serious illness – it's more than a "bad cold". Anyone can catch it – even the fit and healthy.

Some people can end up in hospital or can die, particularly because the disease can make other conditions, such as breathing or heart problems, even worse.

Vaccinations are free from March to the end of June for New Zealanders in these groups:

- people aged 65 and over;
- anyone under 65 years of age (including children) with long-term health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, respiratory disease (including asthma), kidney disease and most cancers.

In addition, for this year (2010 only), the Government will provide free flu immunisation for:

- Pregnant women
- Severely obese people
- Children aged six months to their fifth birthday, on the advice of their doctor.

The Ministry of Health and the National Influenza Strategy Group (NISG) advise New Zealanders to take the following steps to keep themselves and their family/whanau safe from flu this winter:

- Get an influenza vaccination – it's **free** for many people. Talk to your doctor or nurse about

whether a seasonal vaccination is free for you.

- Wash and dry your hands often
- Stay away from people who are sick
- Stay away from work and school if you're unwell
- Cover your coughs and sneezes

People who don't qualify for a free flu vaccine can get it through their general practice for a small charge. Many employers also offer free immunization to their employees.

For free health advice, call Healthline 0800 611 116. For advice about influenza immunisation visit www.fightflu.co.nz or text FLU to 515

ENDS

1National Influenza Strategy Group (NISG)

NISG was formed in 2000 by the Ministry of Health to increase public awareness of influenza, its seriousness and the importance of immunisation to prevent the disease.

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