



17 July 2023

Dear Immunisation Provider,

IMPORTANCE OF VACCINATING YOUNG CHILDREN AGAINST INFLUENZA IN 2023

Influenza season is underway in Western Australia (WA) and current data indicate that the burden of illness is disproportionately high among children less than 5 years of age.

Thus far in 2023 there have been 1799 influenza notifications and 281 influenza-associated hospitalisations among children <5 years; these figures are substantially higher than the 124 notifications and 34 hospitalisations reported, on average, during this same period over 5 previous years (2016-2019 and 2022).

As you are aware, children infected with influenza are more likely than adults to become seriously ill and be hospitalised. This is true for all children, not just those with pre-existing medical conditions.

The high rates of influenza infection and hospitalisations being observed among children this year may be a consequence of two years of very limited influenza circulation during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a greater proportion of younger children without prior exposure to influenza viruses. Therefore, it is particularly important this year that young children are protected from influenza illness through vaccination. Influenza vaccination prevents against severe illness and hospitalisation.

Data from the Australian Immunisation Register indicate influenza vaccination coverage for children in WA remains low. As of 8 July, just 22% of WA children aged 6 months to <5 years received an influenza vaccine in 2023; this is one of the lowest influenza vaccination uptake rates among children in the country.

Influenza vaccines are very safe and have been used in young children for many years, both in Australia and abroad. No safety issues have been identified through ongoing vaccine safety monitoring of the influenza vaccines being used this year.

As an immunisation provider, I urge you to offer the influenza vaccine to all your eligible patients, particularly, children aged 6 months to <5 years. To help promote uptake, beginning 17 July, the WA Department of Health will send an SMS to parents of children <12 years of age encouraging them to book in to receive an influenza vaccine.

For further information visit: https://www.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/Immunisation-schedule-and-catch-up-vaccines or <https://skai.org.au/>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr Revle Bangor-Jones', written in a cursive style.

Dr Revle Bangor-Jones
A/CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER
12 July 2023