



National Indigenous Immunisation message stick newsletter May 2018

2018 Seasonal influenza vaccines now available nationally under the National Immunisation Program (NIP)

Influenza is a major cause of preventable sickness and death among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are much more likely than non-Indigenous children to be hospitalised or die from the flu.

The 2018 NIP seasonal influenza vaccines are now available

The vaccine is free through the NIP for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons who are:

- six months of age to less than five years of age
- 15 years of age and over
- five years of age and over with one of the following medical conditions:

heart disease

lung conditions, such as asthma

chronic illnesses that mean you have to see a doctor more often, such as diabetes

chronic diseases of the nervous system

low immunity

renal disease and failure



- pregnant (at any stage). Pregnant women are at higher risk of severe complications associate with flu. Vaccinating against flu during pregnancy also provides some protection for babies during their first vulnerable moths of life
- six months of age to 10 years old and on aspirin as part of their treatment.

A range of resources including, posters, brochures and fact sheets have been mailed out to vaccination providers, including:

- [2018 seasonal influenza vaccines – clinical advice for vaccination providers \(factsheet\)](#)
- [Australian Immunisation Register – factsheet for vaccination providers](#)
- [The flu vaccine – factsheet for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#)
- [The flu vaccine – poster for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander setting](#)
- [Vaccinate against flu. Protect your baby too – brochure for pregnant women](#)
- [Vaccinate against flu. Protect your baby too – poster for maternal health setting](#)

Additional copies are available for ordering or downloading online through the Department’s immunisation website

- promote the vaccine to eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through displaying the program posters and brochures in your clinic.
- offer vaccination throughout the influenza season, particularly to at-risk groups.
- ensure vaccine safety by checking you have the correct vaccine for the person’s age. Note all 2018 NIP vaccines include the age indication on the barrel of the syringe to make it easier.
- report all influenza vaccinations (for both children and adults) to the Australian Immunisation Register.





Why the Flu shot is so important

IF only I had a dollar for every time I've heard "I got the flu shot, and it gave me the flu", "I don't need it", or simply "I forgot". Come on you mob, let's help stop the spread of flu. Historically, immunisation has been, and remains, a safe, effective and affordable way to improve Aboriginal health, delivering positive outcomes for the First Peoples of all ages.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to get severe flu, or influenza, and need treatment in hospital, with young children at more risk and likely to get very sick with serious chest infections, ending up in intensive care.

Each year the flu is estimated to kill 3000 Australians over the age of 50. It has been reported that between 2005 -2014 flu took more children's lives than any other vaccine-preventable disease, and it's the most common vaccine-preventable disease that sends children to hospital.

Our mob may be passing the flu virus to our Elders and kids without knowing. Since 1999, flu vaccines have been available free for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15-49 with underlying medical conditions, and people over 50. Since 2015, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 6 months to five years are able to receive funded flu vaccines as part of the National Immunisation Program. Growing up, I remember getting needles at school but didn't understand why, just being told stand in line and roll up your sleeves no question asked. When my son was due for his first immunisation I remember my mother asking, "Has he had his needles?" I didn't ask why or questions. I just did it!

Today with all the technology and 'Doctor Google', the myth that the flu shot gives you the flu and makes you very sick is rife in our community. I get my flu vaccine every year to protect myself and ensure I can't pass it on to any of my friends and family to keep our mob out of hospital. I'm not only protecting my son, nephews and nieces, but the community.

Herd immunity

Herd immunity protects the whole community. If a large percentage of community members are immunized against the flu then the risk of flu disease can fall so low that those that are too young or sick to be given the flu vaccine will not be exposed to the disease.



The more our mob are vaccinated against the flu, the more it will keep our people out of hospital.

Recently I was involved in a national evaluation of the 2015 rollout of the influenza immunisation program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids.

We invited more than 85 immunisation services providers to join in, and conducted 42 individual telephone interviews at times convenient to service providers over 12 months from February 2016. Of the 42 service providers, 33% were from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) or their peak bodies, with 20% coming from remote Australia.

Service providers were asked about their experiences with the rollout of the 2015 Influenza Program covering communication and resources, data collection, reporting, strengths, challenges and recommendations for future national immunisation programs. Many themes emerged from the evaluation, but one that stuck out to me was that our mob was not aware that we could have the funded vaccines if we were in the age brackets six months to less than five years and 15 and over.

I can't stress enough that the funded flu/influenza vaccine is there and we need to encourage our mob to have it.

Conditions

For our mob who have medical conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart disease, every illness they contract can make those conditions far worse and they could end up in hospital. Getting the annual flu vaccine is the first and best way to protect you and your mob from the flu particularly our Elders and young babies under six months who can't yet receive the flu vaccine.

We know that strategies are needed to improve the uptake of the influenza vaccine to keep our Elders and children from getting sick .

Although the age bracket may be confusing for some of us, the important thing is that we need to let our mob know the flu vaccines are available and to ask when we visit the AMSs or medical professionals.

You can't get the flu from flu vaccine.



The most common side-effects from flu vaccine are soreness, redness, tenderness or swelling where the shot was given. Some may get a low-grade fever, headache and muscle aches.

Every year I make sure my son and everyone in my household and I receive the flu vaccine. By protecting myself, I reduce the risk of passing the viruses on to someone I love.

That's not a gamble I'm willing to take.

Article by Katrina Clark – first published in the Koori Mail 21st Feb 2018

The Flu vaccine is your best shot at stopping the Flu

Free vaccinations under the National Immunisation Program can be accessed through community controlled Aboriginal Medical Services, local health services or general practitioners

Health disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians continue to be a priority for Australian governments.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are significantly more affected by: low birth weight, chronic diseases and trauma resulting in early deaths and poor social and emotional health.

Historically, immunisation has been and remains, a simple, timely, effective and affordable way to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples health, delivering positive outcomes for Australians of all ages.

Reports that focus on vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs) and vaccination coverage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are published regularly by the National Centre for Immunisation Research (NCIRS).



Chansey Paech the Deputy Speaker of the NT Legislative assembly getting his flu shot at Impanpa Community Remote Clinic Central Australia

Picture taken at the Impanpa Clinic : Chansey Paech is a member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly since 2016, representing the electorate of Namatjira. He is of Aranda and Gurindji descent. Paech is also the Deputy Speaker of the Northern Territory Legislative

Introducing – Aboriginal Population Health Trainee, under the NSW Health Aboriginal Population Health Training Program NSW

Natasha Larter (Tash) is a Yuin woman from Nowra on the south Coast of NSW. Tash joined the Sydney Children’s Hospital Network in July 2017 as the Aboriginal Population Health Trainee, under the NSW Health Aboriginal Population Health Training program. Tash is placed with the Community Child Health Team, in Randwick for 3 years, and as a part of her trainee program, she completes project style rotations similar to the work she is currently undertaking with the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS), alongside the National Indigenous Immunisation Coordinator, Katrina Clark. During Tash’s program, she will complete a Masters of Public Health at UNSW, with a specialty in Indigenous Health and Wellbeing.



Tash has a particular interest in programs designed to improve the social determinants that shape health outcomes for Aboriginal people as well as in vaccine preventable diseases, and would like to increase acceptance for Aboriginal perspective, worldview and experience within health care services. Since November 2017, Tash has been working at NCIRS on the 4th national report on Vaccine Preventable Disease (VPD) and Vaccination Coverage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, contributing whole chapters on disease epidemiology and trends. Tash will also have a key role in developing the next edition of the Vaccination for Our Mob report, a plain English version of the national VPD report aimed at people working in the Aboriginal immunisation area. Tash has designed and conducted a short survey of people working in this area, aiming to improve the usefulness of the Vaccination for Our Mob report.

Tash has so far enjoyed working amongst various teams in her role, and feels that her work can contribute to improving health outcome for our mob.

Vaccination for Our Mob report will be release this year or early 2019.

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