

## Vaccination campaign starts as flu season strikes

Mackay Base Hospital staff are lining up to be vaccinated against the flu.

Mackay Hospital and Health Service starts its annual vaccination campaign tomorrow for about 1000 hospital staff.

Staff are able to have a free vaccine each year to keep them well and ensure they do not spread infection to vulnerable patients.

Influenza is a highly contagious and potentially serious disease that can be spread through coughing and sneezing.

Infection Prevention nurse Vicki Barrow said everyone should get vaccinated now to protect themselves and other vulnerable members of the community.

The Department of Health's nationally-funded Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Program usually starts on March 15 but was delayed until April 20 this year.

Mrs Barrow said the delay in vaccines was due to the flu strain changing twice since the 2014 season.

"This double-strain change is an unusual occurrence and has caused manufacturing delays due to the time taken to develop, test and distribute the reagents needed to make the vaccine," she said,

"We're expecting to vaccinate more people this year due to the expected severity of the flu season," she said.

So far this year laboratories have confirmed 1478 cases of influenza in Queensland, significantly more than any other state.

"There have already been some cases of in the Mackay HHS with at least a dozen laboratory confirmed cases already and some have required hospitalisation," Mrs Barrow said.

"The 2015 influenza vaccine is now available, and now is the time people should be having it to ensure they are properly covered in time for winter," she said.

Mrs Barrow said each year the influenza vaccine reflected the circulating strains, providing the best protection against current strains of flu.

Queensland Health provides the following 'at risk' groups with free vaccine against the flu every year:

- People aged over 65
- Pregnant women
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 15

- Anyone aged over 6 months with medical risks such as heart and respiratory diseases.
- Anyone with a chronic disease

Please see your GP for these vaccinations.

The vaccine is safe for pregnant women and babies six months and older, as well as the broader community.

“The risk of major side effects is extremely low so we encourage everyone to be vaccinated now,” Ms Barrow said

“For pregnant women the vaccine offers protection to their baby for the first six months of life which is very important.”

## ENDS

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