



MEDIA RELEASE

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Leading health bodies urge older Australians with diabetes to protect themselves and their community with a flu vaccination

Diabetes Australia and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) have joined forces to encourage more than 650,000 Australians with diabetes aged over 65 to receive a flu vaccination, after a nightmare 2017 flu season claimed more than 1000 lives.

Diabetes Australia CEO Professor Greg Johnson urged Australians to heed the warnings after last year's flu season and get a flu shot this year.

"All Australians with diabetes should get the flu shot, but older Australians are at a higher risk of severe flu and even death," Professor Johnson said.

"This year, the Australian Government is funding two new enhanced flu vaccines for over-65s, as well as the regular flu shot that is available free to all Australians with diabetes."

"Last year was a very bad year for influenza with more than 250,000 Australians impacted, and tragically 1000 deaths."

"People with diabetes are much more likely to be hospitalised with the flu, and they are much more likely to die from the flu than people without diabetes."

"Studies have found that people with diabetes are between three and six times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of influenza compared to people without diabetes, and once hospitalised they are up to 92 times more likely to die."

Professor Johnson said there were several reasons why influenza is more serious for people with diabetes.

"Diabetes may impair a person's immune system which can impact on how the body responds to the flu and increase the risk of serious infection," he said.

"When you've got the flu, it's harder to eat, drink and take your diabetes medication, all of which can make it more difficult for people to manage their diabetes."

"In some cases, this can lead to diabetic ketoacidosis and even death."

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Professor Johnson said the enhanced flu vaccines could provide an extra layer of defence for over-65s.

“The enhanced flu vaccines which are newly available this year have been proven to provide a better protection against the flu,” he said.

President of the RACGP Dr Bastian Seidel encouraged patients to take advantage of the Federal Government’s free influenza vaccines for people with diabetes.

“Patients with diabetes should take advantage of free vaccinations available to them through their GP,” Dr Seidel said.

“Specialist GPs are up-to-date on when the flu season will affect Australian patients and will continue to offer vaccinations throughout the flu season.”

“Your GP can offer specific advice that is suited to you and your family’s individual needs and circumstances.”

Dr Seidel said vulnerable members of the community would be protected if more Australians receive their vaccination, ahead of this year’s flu season.

“We want to see enough people vaccinated to create herd immunity that will impede the spread of flu across the community,” Dr Seidel said.

“It will protect those who are vulnerable to influenza, like children and the elderly.”

This year two ‘enhanced’ flu vaccines, Fluad and Fluzone High Dose, are available for free for over 65s under the Federal Government’s National Immunisation Program.

About Diabetes Australia

Diabetes Australia is the national body for people affected by all types of diabetes and those at risk. Diabetes Australia is committed to reducing the impact of diabetes. We work in partnership with diabetes health professionals, researchers and the community to minimise the impact of diabetes.

About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) was established in 1958 and is Australia’s peak general practice representative organisation.

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The RACGP has more than 38,000 members working in or towards a career in general practice across metropolitan, regional and rural areas of the country. Nine in every 10 GPs are with the RACGP.

A core objective of the RACGP is to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health needs. As a result, the RACGP established a dedicated Faculty for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in 2010 to help 'close the gap'. The Faculty has more than 8,000 members either working in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare sector or who have a passion and interest in this area. The RACGP undertakes a range of activities to ensure the delivery of high quality culturally responsive care and to assist in the growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander general practice workforce.

Visit www.racgp.org.au.

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