

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SWINE FLU VACCINATION ROLL OUT IN THE HANDS OF GENERAL PRACTICE

Lowering the risk of a second wave of swine flu (Influenza H1N1) in western Sydney through the flu vaccination program will be in the hands of local general practices, said Chair of the Western Sydney Immunisation Committee and Blacktown GP, Dr Michael Fasher.

The Commonwealth has purchased 21 million doses of the swine flu vaccine (Panvax). The first instalment has been distributed to general practices and the national vaccination program begins officially from Wednesday, 30 September. The vaccine is only available through general practice or state-run clinics.

People who wish to have the vaccination should contact their general practice to find out the vaccination process, Dr Fasher said.

"Some general practices will be running 'flu clinics', offering a block of time where patients can attend to have the vaccination. Others will be managing on a case-by-case basis or aiming to target their vulnerable populations first," Dr Fasher said.

The influenza vaccination will be available to anyone over 10 years old who wishes to have it, though the Federal Government is encouraging General Practitioners (GPs) to ensure health care workers, pregnant women, Indigenous Australians and people with underlying medical conditions are vaccinated as a priority.

He stressed that the vaccination was very similar to the seasonal flu vaccine and was as safe.

"The company which developed the vaccine are Australian-based and have been creating the seasonal influenza vaccine for about 40 years," he said.

The vaccination program is important to avoid a second wave of flu epidemic hitting Australian shores.

"While we are seeing flu numbers drop as winter comes to an end, we are aware of increasing influenza in the northern hemisphere. It's also worth noting that the swine flu epidemic hit the northern hemisphere during their summer, so it may not just be a winter illness," Dr Fasher said.

Under-10s are not able to be vaccinated yet, because the safety trials on the paediatric version are not completed. This is expected to be cleared shortly.

WentWest will be supporting local general practices with information about using multi-dose vials, organising flu clinics and recall reminder through our immunisation program. This is an important role for general practice to ensure the western Sydney community is protected against further outbreaks of this disease," Dr Fasher said.

For more information please phone Sally Martin, Practice Support Manager, on (02) 8833 8030 or email: sally.martin@wentwest.com.au.

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About WentWest:

Covering the full spectrum of General Practice training, education and support, WentWest offers both the Australian General Practice Training (AGPT) program to General Practice Registrars in the Western Sydney region as well as Division of General Practice services to more than 200 general practices in the local government areas of Auburn, Blacktown, Holroyd and Parramatta.

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