

## 2/3 of Australians unlikely to get vaccinated against swine flu

December 23 2009

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Australia risks a serious swine flu (H1N1 influenza virus) outbreak with two-thirds (65 per cent) of unprotected Australians stating they're unlikely to get vaccinated against the disease in the next 12 months, according to an MBF Healthwatch Poll.

"While the number of new cases of swine flu in [Australia](#) might have waned since last winter, the [disease](#) is still a major threat," Bupa Australia\* Chief Medical Officer, Dr Christine Bennett warned.

Despite the public health campaign, the statistics found that Australians are still confused about their level of risk of contracting swine flu and the effectiveness of the vaccine. Many people also said they were reluctant to get vaccinated, with the most common reasons given being:

- It is unnecessary (48 per cent)
- Health experts are giving mixed messages (41 per cent)
- The threat in Australia has passed (38 per cent)
- They are not at risk of getting swine flu (38 per cent)
- They have concerns about the safety or possible side effects from the vaccine (39 per cent).

Since the swine flu outbreak, Australia has had more than 37,000

confirmed cases and 191 deaths as a result of the disease.

"The number of cases and deaths from this disease is increasing at an alarming rate into the winter months in the northern hemisphere, with more than 22 million people in the USA infected and 10,500 people dying from the disease," Dr Bennett said.

"It is highly likely, with the increase in the numbers of Australians travelling overseas and an influx of overseas visitors to Australia over the summer months, that we could see a spike in new cases here."

"While swine flu can be a relatively mild disease for most, it can also kill and make people sick enough to end up in intensive care on life support," said Dr Bennett, who especially urges people with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk to not delay getting the free vaccination.

The poll found that, in terms of people at higher risk, only 33 per cent with asthma or lung disease, 45 per cent with diabetes, 28 per cent with reduced immunity, and 40 per cent with heart disease had been vaccinated.

Of people planning to travel to the northern hemisphere over the summer holidays, 71 per cent were not intending to get vaccinated against the disease.

"It is worrying that the majority of people, even those most at risk of complications, haven't been vaccinated and don't intend to protect themselves in the coming year. Pregnant women are a group for whom this condition has been particularly serious where complications from swine flu seriously threaten their health and their unborn baby," she added.

With the recent availability of a vaccine for children from 6 months, Dr Bennett encouraged parents to get children under 10 years vaccinated, in particular, as they have accounted for one in five swine flu cases and a quarter of all hospitalisations. For parents and carers of children younger than six months, they should consider getting the vaccine themselves.

"We know from our research that people seem uninformed and confused about the risk of catching swine flu, its potential consequences and about whether it is advisable to be vaccinated," Dr Bennett said, "The best protection you can afford yourself and others is to get vaccinated against [swine flu](#)."

Bupa Australia offers the following five simple ways to protect against catching and spreading cold and flu:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Wash your hands
- Don't share personal items such as eating and drinking utensils, food and drink
- Regularly clean surfaces such as tables, benches and door handles, as the virus can live for up to 48 hours
- Avoid close contact with others if you are unwell with cold or flu

Source: Research Australia

Citation: 2/3 of Australians unlikely to get vaccinated against swine flu (2009, December 23)

retrieved 2 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-12-australians-vaccinated-swine-flu.html>

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