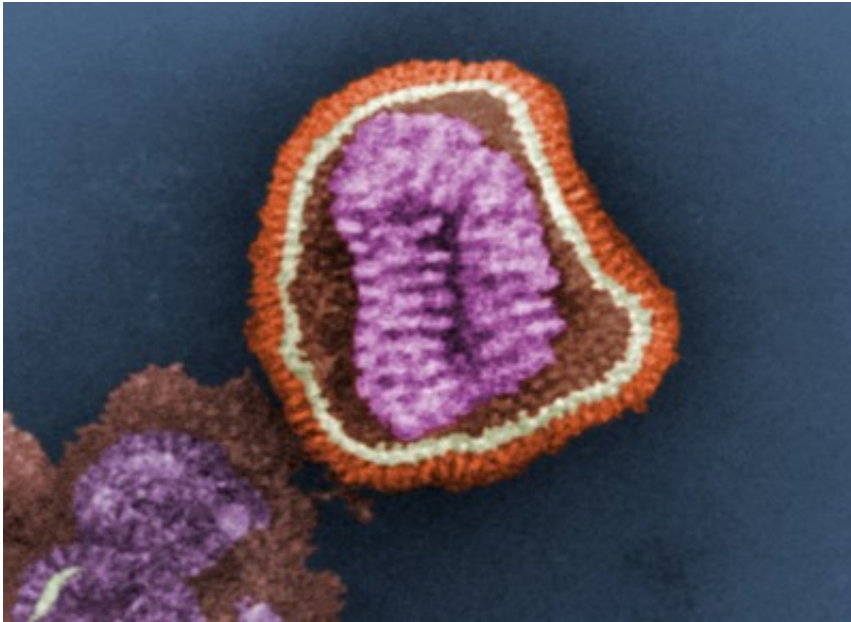


Hospital-acquired influenza rare but serious

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Electron microscope image of an influenza virus particle. Credit: Frederick Murphy

(Medical Xpress)—Medical researchers urge vaccination this flu season as new research shows that hospital-acquired, or nosocomial, influenza is relatively uncommon, but can be severe.

Research led by Monash University's Associate Professor Allen Cheng and published today in the *Medical Journal of Australia* - which features a special on vaccinations - reviewed cases of nosocomial influenza in a number of Australian hospitals in the 2010 and 2011 flu seasons.

Using data from a hospital-based influenza monitoring service, the study found of 598 cases of influenza, 26, or 4.3 per cent, were hospital-acquired. One of these nosocomial cases was fatal; however, this patient also suffered respiratory and renal disease.

The researchers found a connection with existing conditions and nosocomial influenza, finding that these patients were more likely to be immunosuppressed or have an underlying malignancy.

Patients with hospital-acquired influenza also had considerably longer hospital stays, although the researchers noted that other factors, including the patients' coexisting health issues, may influence this.

Associate Professor Cheng, from the Monash Department of Epidemiology and [Preventive Medicine](#), said the risks associated with hospital acquired influenza should not be underestimated.

"While we don't know where these patients got their infections, there has always been concern that patients may catch the flu from hospital staff," Associate Professor Cheng said.

"For most people, flu isn't a [dangerous infection](#), but for patients who are already in hospital for other reasons, it can be a disaster."

The research team recommended the vaccination of patients, healthcare workers and visitors to help reduce nosocomial transmission. Other strategies included improving compliance with isolation and [hand hygiene](#) procedures and encouraging hospital staff to stay at home when they were unwell.

"It is thought that less than half of Australian health care workers receive the flu vaccine each season. Although the flu vaccine isn't completely protective, it is still better than not being vaccinated," Associate

Professor Cheng said.

"We strongly encourage all [health care workers](#) to be vaccinated for their own benefit as well as that of their patients."

Provided by Monash University

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