

Flu surveillance suggests an early and severe season

June 1 2015



Today is the first day of winter, and for many Australians with winter comes influenza.

According to the director of the national [influenza](#) surveillance network, the University of Adelaide's Professor Nigel Stocks, this flu season is underway early and it's expected to be particularly relentless, so people should get vaccinated now.

"Our data indicated that in the last two weeks of May, confirmed [diagnosis](#) of influenza increased dramatically to over 20% – which means 20% of patients with flu-like symptoms who were swabbed for

the national flu surveillance were found to be positive for influenza. This compared to 1% at the same time last year," says Professor Stocks, the Director of ASPREN (the Australian Sentinel Practices Research Network) and Head of General Practice at the University of Adelaide.

"Historically, when the flu season starts early, it will be a particularly bad season. And, when the United States has had a severe flu season, which they did this year, Australia will also have a bad flu season.

"There are two primary strains of flu: influenza A and influenza B. Both strains come with similar symptoms, but the key difference is influenza A virus evolves faster than influenza B virus.

"This year our data shows the burden of influenza B to be higher than usual. The [influenza vaccine](#) provides excellent protection against influenza B," he says.

Professor Stocks says vaccinations are very effective at protecting the community against influenza.

"We know that the incidence of influenza reduces considerably after a pandemic because more people get vaccinated. For example, following the swine flu pandemic of 2009, there were far fewer cases of influenza because more people sought out vaccinations," says Professor Stocks.

"Vaccination in Australia is free to people aged over 65 years and those in 'at risk' groups. Most healthcare workers get immunised and many others choose to vaccinate themselves or their children to minimise work or school absences.

"I'd encourage anyone considering a vaccination to get one as soon as possible because the [flu season](#) is already upon us," he says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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