

# Flu outbreak kills 7 residents in Australian aged care home

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An influenza outbreak has killed seven residents of a care home for the elderly in Australia and sickened 116 other residents and staff, an official said Friday.

The residents, aged between 70 to 94, had died at St. John's Retirement Village at Wangaratta in northeast Victoria state since Aug. 16, Victoria Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton said.

"We are at the peak of one of the worst flu seasons ever and the elderly are one of highest-risk groups," Sutton told reporters.

Most of the 146 residents in the facility had been vaccinated, but the vaccine is less effective in the elderly, Sutton said. Vaccines are not effective against all flu strains.

There were 123 cases of flu, including the seven fatalities, among the residents and 200 staff at the home, he said. Vaccination was not compulsory among residents or staff.

All the dead had pre-existing conditions that made them vulnerable to serious illness, Sutton said. The outbreak at the home was almost over, but another elderly resident was at risk of dying before infections stop.

Sutton said the seven deaths made this outbreak the worst he had encountered during his seven years in the state health department.

The home notified state health authorities of the outbreak two days before the first death, he said. Authorities found no flaws in the home's infection prevention and control procedures, Sutton said.

So far this year, 11,300 flu cases have been confirmed in Victoria, a state with a population of 6.2 million.

The current Southern Hemisphere flu season comes six months after the Northern Hemisphere season.

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