Government of Western Australia
Department of Health

Vaccine Update 446 - Respiratory viral infections continue to circulate this winter

Respiratory viral infections continue to circulate this winter

Respiratory viral infections, including influenza A and B, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), continue to circulate in the community.

The Australian Health Protection Committee (AHPC) notes that nationally:

- Reported influenza activity has increased since early May 2025, which is consistent with expected seasonal patterns. Although influenza A is the most common strain, there is a higher proportion of influenza B infections compared to last year, particularly in school aged children. Influenza continues to be a significant disease in children.

- Hospitalisations due to influenza have increased as the season has progressed, particularly among children under 5 and adults over 65.

- Reported COVID-19 activity has been decreasing since late June and is much lower than previous years. Despite this, **COVID-19 remains the leading cause of acute respiratory infection mortality.**

- Reported RSV activity has also shown a seasonal increase. Overall case numbers are lower than observed last year, most notably in infants.

AHPC remains concerned about the low influenza vaccine coverage rates this year remains low, especially in high-risk age groups. This year's seasonal influenza vaccine is well matched to the influenza virus strains circulating in the community.

Despite public health efforts, nationally, **40% of adults aged 65 years and over and 77% of children aged six months to less than five years have not received an influenza vaccine this year and are at risk.** Additionally, fewer at-risk adults have received a COVID-19 vaccine in the past year compared to the year before.

AHPC is reassured by the uptake of the RSV vaccine in pregnant people across Australia.

The best way to protect against severe illness, hospitalisation and death from vaccine preventable diseases is to stay up to date with recommended immunisations. It is not too late to get vaccinated.

For more information about free vaccinations, see the Western Australian Immunisation Schedule.

AHPC advises that people with respiratory symptoms should stay at home while unwell, avoid contact with people at increased risk of severe disease and refrain from visiting high risk settings such as aged care homes.

Antiviral treatment for influenza and COVID-19 remain available from healthcare providers, however, is most effective when administered within 48 hours of onset of symptoms. Know your risk, and if you are at risk of severe disease talk to your health care provider about a plan to access antiviral treatments for COVID-19 and influenza.

AHPC, in collaboration with the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, will continue to monitor respiratory illness activity across Australia throughout the year and provide additional advice if concerning trends emerge.

WA vaccination coverage

Vaccination coverage in WA for respiratory illnesses remains suboptimal.

Less than 10% of the WA population were vaccinated for COVID-19 in the last 6 months and about 10% were vaccinated in the last 12 months.

In the year to date, RSV disease notifications are higher compared to the same period in 2024. To date, 17,184 pregnant adults and infants have received a dose of RSV immunisation this year.

Influenza vaccination coverage remains low at 21% for children aged 6 months to under 5 years, 56% for those over 65 years, and a combined average of 40% for those aged 5 to 65 years. This is concerning noting the increased hospitalisations for influenza in these cohorts.

As an immunisation provider, you are a trusted source of information and often, the primary influence in your patient’s decision making. Please recommend these important immunisations to eligible patients to protect Western Australians from respiratory illnesses.

COVID-19 leading cause of mortality from ARI in Australia 2023-2025

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recently released a report on the Independent assessment of the origins of SARS CoV 2, developed by the Scientific Advisory Group for the Origins of Novel Pathogens (SAGO). The report identified no evidence that XFG, a SARS-CoV-2 variant, leads to more severe outcomes than other circulating COVID-19 variants – and that current COVID-19 vaccines are expected to remain effective in preventing severe disease.

It is anticipated XFG will become more prevalent around the world in the coming months, alongside the now-dominant NB.1.8.1 sub-variant – which the WHO also declared a variant under monitoring (VUM) in a separate risk evaluation in May, while noting it also presented a low additional risk to the public.

The report also shows, however, that COVID-19 disease remains the leading cause of mortality from acute respiratory infection in Australia across the 2023–2025 period.

The WA Department of Health urges immunisation providers to prioritise vaccination – including with regular booster doses – for people at highest risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection, including older people and people living in residential aged care facilities.

Protection provided from COVID-19 vaccination wanes over time. COVID-19 vaccine boosters can strengthen your immune system and improve the duration of protection from severe illness caused by COVID-19.

According to the Australian Immunisation Handbook, COVID-19 vaccine recommendations are as below:

- **75 years and older**
  - booster dose is recommended every 6 months
- **65-74 years**
  - recommended to have a booster dose every 12 months
  - can consider a booster every 6 months based on a risk-benefit assessment.
- **18-64 years**
  - eligible for a booster dose every 12 months
  - or severely immunocompromised, a booster dose is recommended every 12 months, and are eligible for a dose every 6 months.
- **5-17 years**

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    - booster doses are not recommended for healthy individuals under the age of 18
    - if an individual has severe immunocompromise they are eligible to a booster dose once per year
- **Children under 5 years**
    - booster doses are not recommended for children under 5 years of age

For more information visit:

- COVID-19 vaccine HealthyWA website
- COVID-19 immunisation Corporate website

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to protecting Western Australians from vaccine preventable diseases.

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