



From the Head of Clinical Development

Welcome to the March 2018 newsletter. I hope everyone is looking forward to Easter. It may seem early in the piece but with the "flu season the next "big" thing to be thinking about this newsletter will discuss the issues surrounding the vaccination and signs and symptoms of flu. I remember working as a locum pharmacist in the community when I was greeted by a customer wanting something for the "flu. My first question was to ask "Who has the "flu?" and the indignant reply was "I do". If any of you have been unfortunate enough to have been struck down with the "flu" you will know that the last place you would want to be is standing in a pharmacy!

In general, the 2017 influenza season saw higher than usual numbers of presentations than in previous years. The estimated number of people having influenza last year is about 5% of the population. Last year there were an estimated 29,000 admissions to hospital with a confirmed case of influenza infection. The rates of notification were highest in adults over the age of 80 years and these people were mostly affected by influenza A (H3N2). Unfortunately, the influenza A (H3N2) strain appeared to be the most severe as it caused the greatest percentage of complications and deaths. Eastern seaboard states and South Australia were most affected seeing unusually high levels of influenza. The prevalence of influenza is probably under reported as it is a common disease and the symptoms can be fairly non-specific with differing degrees of severity on presentation.

There were several outbreaks in Aged Care Facilities across the country leading to calls for mandatory influenza vaccination for everyone working in the aged care sector. This is mainly due to the fact that we are sources of transmission of infectious diseases and the population we are caring for are the vulnerable and consequently more likely to contract the virus. There were 461 reported outbreaks in ACFs in NSW alone, let alone in other states.

Ensure all residents and staff get the flu vaccine

Widespread vaccination contributes to the "herd effect," reducing the spread of this potentially deadly viral illness. Please take care – get vaccinated this year, and ensure that residents are offered the effective vaccine prevention too.



FLU SEASON - Frequently Asked Questions

❖ **What flu vaccines are available in Australia this year?**

In Australia in 2018 there are 2 main types of flu vaccine available:

a) Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (QIV)

- Suitable for adults up to 64 years of age.
- Protects against four strains of influenza (two A strains and two B strains) ie. broader protection than the old Trivalent vaccine (TIV) by providing protection against one extra B strain of influenza.

b) Trivalent Influenza vaccine (TIV) – Fluzone® and Fluzone High Dose®

- Fluzone is a new high dose vaccine to provide increased protection for people aged 65 years and older. Fluzone contains an ingredient which triggers a stronger immune response.
- Both vaccines protect against two A strains and one B strain. Over 65s are more susceptible to influenza A strains with the B strain less implicated.

❖ **Who should be vaccinated?**

All residents in aged care homes and health care workers are recommended for annual vaccination, with rare exceptions e.g. severe allergies to the flu vaccine or immunocompromised.

❖ **When should vaccination be carried out?**

Vaccination is best carried out during March to May each year before the onset of the peak flu season from July to September. Vaccines will be available from April 2018.

IS IT A COLD OR THE FLU?



Feature Article:

Influenza – facts from fiction

The flu season is fast approaching. Last year's horrific flu season made a devastating impact around the world. More than 90% of the 1,100 flu related deaths in 2017 were in people aged over 65 years of age.

How long does it take to be protected and how long does protection last?

Full immunity is reached around 10–14 days after vaccination. Antibodies will peak at around 4-6 weeks and this is when the resident is most protected. Then antibodies will gradually fall but protection remains for around 1 year.

How effective is the Influenza vaccine?

Vaccination prevents up to 90% of cases of influenza infection in healthy adults.

What are the possible side-effects?

Common side effects include transient injection site reactions (pain, redness, itching or swelling, small hard lump that may persist for a few weeks), transient fever, muscle aches or headache which usually last no more than 1-2 days.

Can I get the flu from the vaccination?

No. The vaccine contains only inactivated virus particles and is therefore incapable of causing influenza infection. A runny nose or sore throat after vaccination may indicate a viral illness.

Practice points for vaccination

- Test doses are not recommended.
- Routine use of paracetamol to prevent fever at time of vaccination is no longer recommended.
- Observe all residents for at least 15 minutes after vaccination.

Facts about flu

In this section we will discuss the common misconceptions surrounding influenza and the difference between the flu and the common cold.

Both the common cold and flu are caused by viral infections. They are both respiratory illnesses and can share some symptoms but are caused by very different viruses.

The viruses that cause the common cold include Rhinovirus, Parainfluenza virus, Metapneumovirus, Coronaviruses, Adenovirus, Human respiratory syncytial virus and Enterovirus. The viruses that cause the 'flu are Influenza A, Influenza B and Influenza C.

The common cold primarily affects the upper respiratory tract leading to symptoms of a sore throat and runny nose. These symptoms, although they make you feel miserable are relatively harmless.

The flu on the other hand affects the lower respiratory tract and is extremely contagious. Those most at risk from contracting the 'flu are the old and the young. Symptoms of the flu are more severe than a common cold and include high temperatures, severe muscle aches and pains and extreme fatigue.

Older people have a "weaker" immune system as well as having multiple chronic illnesses which can increase their risk of getting a cold or the flu.

All these viruses are transmitted in the same way. Small airborne droplets which are produced when an infected individual sneeze, coughs or clears their throat. These droplets can be then inhaled by an uninfected individual. They can also be transmitted by hand to hand contact or contact with contaminated items e.g. a mobile phone. This is why it is so important to cover your face when you sneeze and to follow hand hygiene rules.

Quick Tip

Prevention of Colds and Flu



To help reduce chances of contracting a cold or the flu follow these simple steps:

1. Ensure you adhere to your facilities hand hygiene protocols.
2. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands as these are 3 places that harbour the viruses.
3. If you cough or sneeze cover your mouth with your upper arm and wash your hands.
4. Use tissues rather than a handkerchief and throw them away when as soon as you have finished with them – **don't leave them in your pocket**, and then wash your hands.
5. Keep your workspace clean and ensure door handles are also cleaned regularly.
6. Don't share cutlery, cups and plates.
7. If you can, exercise and eat a healthy diet to boost the immune system.
8. Get enough sleep as this again will boost your immune system.
9. Most importantly **GET A FLU VACCINE.**

Latest News

Ward MM at the Queensland LASA Conference

Natalie was invited to present at the Queensland LASA conference this month where she discussed issues surrounding medication management.

Ward MM were invited to the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia SA / NT branch careers expo where we had a stand showcasing alternative career pathways for pharmacists working at Ward MM.

Our Latest Recruit

Welcome to our latest recruit, Diana Chau, from Brisbane, who joined our amazing team of clinical pharmacists this month!

Happy Easter!

The Ward MM Team wish you every happiness and a safe and enjoyable Easter break!



Notes from facilities serviced by Ward MM

It is quite common for us to receive similar enquiries from more than one facility in our network. In this section we summarise questions with a common basis – as a part of our “connect – network – share” ethos, we share the information with all of our facilities.

Q. “What are the symptoms of colds and flu?”

A. With the common cold symptoms generally appear one to three days after exposure.

Symptoms can include the following:

1. Sore throat
2. Nasal congestion
3. Stuffy or runny nose
4. Low grade fever

5. Cough
6. Malaise
7. Mild headache
8. Sneezing

Symptoms of the flu can appear between one to four days after exposure and include:

1. Aching muscles – particularly arms, legs and back
2. Headache
3. Sore throat
4. Sweating and chills
5. Weakness and fatigue
6. Dry cough
7. Nasal congestion
8. Fever > 38C
9. Shortness of breath

Treatment for either virus is largely based on symptoms and includes regular paracetamol or ibuprofen (providing it's safe to use). These are useful to help bring temperatures down and to treat aches and pains. Decongestants may help with a blocked nose (check for contraindications). Using eucalyptus oil with steamed water as an inhalation or on a handkerchief can also be used to relieve symptoms. However, don't forget to rest up too.

Viral infections do not respond to antibiotics and should not be used to treat colds and the flu. Occasionally the flu may lead to a secondary bacterial infection e.g. pneumonia and antibiotics will then be prescribed to treat that infection.

Natalie Soulsby, Head of Clinical Development, Ward MM.



Meet your Ward MM Team Member

Max Soulsby works as an administrative assistant at Ward MM. What he likes most about Ward MM are the flexibility of the working hours, which is suitable with his university schedule and the ability to work from anywhere, whether it is at home or in his university.

Most meaningful moments... Getting only a couple of metres away from a wild rhino in Zimbabwe. Really put everything in perspective seeing a wild animal up close with no protection at all.

My biggest challenge... Finding a job in the legal field! With hundreds of graduates every year it is going to be a real challenge to find work that is challenging and in a firm that I want to work in.

I'd be lost without... My computer. It is where I do all my work, for university and Ward MM. I think I would actually cry if it stopped working.