

## **Media Release**

**Thursday 18 March 2010**

### **Influenza Update**

Phase Two of the 2010 influenza vaccination campaign is now underway, with the availability of a seasonal influenza vaccine, and the regions' DHBs hope it will be even more successful than phase one (the early protection campaign).

This year the influenza vaccination campaign is being delivered in two phases because of the emergence of the new pandemic H1N1 influenza strain in April 2009.

The first phase was the early protection vaccination campaign offered by the Otago and Southland DHBs during February and March. This vaccine was designed to protect against the pandemic strain only and required two doses, three weeks apart. It was offered to front line health care workers in general practice and high risk hospital departments, as well as at risk patients aged 6 months to 64 years.

Otago and Southland Medical Officer of Health Dr Poore says altogether 1531 people (health care staff and at risk patients) in Otago and Southland have had one dose of the early protection vaccine, with 773 having two doses. Many people have opted to have the seasonal vaccine as their second dose as it has arrived earlier than expected.

"An uptake of 1500 is a great effort and we are really pleased people are taking the influenza immunisation seriously," she said.

The second phase has now also started. This is the usual seasonal influenza vaccine and one dose provides protection against three influenza strains. This programme is being offered by general practice teams along with many workplaces.

"The focus for the seasonal influenza vaccination campaign this year is on encouraging the most at risk groups to be vaccinated," said Dr Poore.

"During 2009 those most affected were people aged under 65 years with underlying chronic illness, pregnant women, children under 5 and those with Body Mass Index (BMI) of more than 35. Usually we focus on those over 65 years of age but this year things are a bit different with this new influenza strain. "

Eligibility for free vaccine has been extended to these groups for 2010.

"So far surveillance of influenza-like-illness from sentinel general practices shows the usual summer pattern of low levels of illness", said Dr Poore. "However the pandemic strain that emerged last year is expected to predominate during 2010."

"Vaccination is the best way to prevent influenza so high vaccination coverage will reduce the burden of illness this winter," she said.

**-Ends-**