



Media Release

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Otago and Southland Seasonal Influenza Update

The Southern DHB is now seeing increasing levels of influenza like illness in the community, however these rates are consistent with most other winter seasons.

"We are taking a business as usual approach at this time because the pattern and level of illness is consistent with what normally happens at this time of year," says Otago and Southland Medical Officer of Health Dr Marion Poore.

"General practices are managing the workload and people seem to be aware of the importance of basic hygiene messages."

"In addition, many people have had the seasonal vaccination which is the best form of protection."

The World Health Organisation has now moved to a post pandemic phase because the new H1N1 virus is behaving as a seasonal influenza virus. However localised outbreaks may still happen.

In the Southern DHB catchment (Otago and Southland) the sentinel general practices provide information on rates of influenza -like-illness each week. The level of illness has risen in the last seven days to 80 per 100,000 population.

"Again, the pattern is consistent for this time of year," said Dr Poore.

The Southern DHB region has also had eight laboratory confirmed cases of H1N1 but as yet no admissions to Intensive Care Units.

Nationally, rates of influenza-like-illness have been increasing in recent weeks and have doubled in the last week from 77 per 100,000 to 140 per 100,000 population.

Rates of illness have been highest for the 0 – 14 year age group and have more than doubled for this age bracket over the last week. Although the new H1N1 virus predominates, other influenza viruses are also circulating.

Dr Poore said she is pleased to report there has been an increased uptake of seasonal influenza vaccine in the Southland and Otago regions this year, with 69,740 doses of seasonal vaccine distributed as at 30 June 2010. This compares to 63,850 at 30 June 2009. Some 50% of DHB hospital employees have also been vaccinated this year.

Dr Poore said the groups most at risk of developing serious complications from this year's pandemic strain of influenza continue to be the same as last year.

"These include children and young people, those of any age with underlying chronic medical conditions, and pregnant women," she said.

"Immunisation is the most effective way of preventing disease but basic infection prevention and control measures remain the mainstay for reducing levels of illness.

"These include regular hand washing and drying, covering coughs and staying home if you are sick."

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