

Your shot at flu immunity

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Vital to get vaccinated as experts warn virus set to hit hundreds of thousands

EXPERTS are urging people to get their flu shot now amid fears we are facing an influenza epidemic as deadly as 2017, when more than 1200 Australians died.

This year there have been in excess of 6000 confirmed cases in Victoria — three times the number for the same period in 2017.

In Hume, there have been 178 cases recorded so far this year, compared with 35 at the same time last year.

Sunbury Community Health chief executive Phillip Ripper said he was particularly concerned about vulnerable residents like young children, the elderly, or those with a weakened immune system.

“The flu doesn’t discriminate, and anyone can be affected, that’s why it is so important that everyone in the Sunbury community protects

themselves against the flu this season,” he said.

“When more people are vaccinated, fewer people become ill or suffer life-threatening complications from influenza. That’s why it’s vital to get your yearly flu shot today.”

Australian Medical Association Victoria president Julian Rait said now was the ideal time to get your flu shot.

“Last year we had a particularly mild season, which can create some complacency in the community about vaccination,” he said.

“(This year) we could have a flu season as bad as we did in 2017, when there were more than 1200 deaths and more than 250,000 Australians affected.”

Assoc Prof Rait said this year’s strain was a

combination of new strains of the virus and a “hangover” from last year’s strain. He said more than six million free vaccinations would be available nationwide for at-risk people such as pregnant women, over-65s and people with weakened immunity.

The flu vaccine is available from your GP and through community sessions.

Some pharmacies are also

able to provide the vaccine for those aged 16 and over. Assoc Prof Rait urged people who did have influenza symptoms to stay home from work, wash their hands and dispose of used tissues to prevent the virus spreading.

He said symptoms could range from coughing and sneezing to fever, fatigue, muscle aches and gastrointestinal problems.

Victorian chief health officer Brett Sutton said vaccination was the best defence against the flu.