



## **Considering the Influenza (Flu) Vaccine for your Child**

### **Influenza Virus (The Flu):**

The Flu is an infection caused by influenza A and B viruses. It most commonly affects the nose, throat and lungs, although can involve other parts of the body. Influenza usually begins with a sudden onset of fever and a combination of aches and pains, headache, cough or noisy breathing, sore throat, runny nose and low energy. The Flu is not the same as the common cold - it usually causes more significant symptoms and has greater rates of complications.

Influenza occurs mainly during the winter months. Each year infections are caused by slightly different strains of the Flu virus. Occasionally one of these strains can cause a more widespread or severe outbreak.

The Flu is very contagious. It can spread through respiratory droplets. A person with influenza is contagious from the day before symptoms begin until a few days after. Good hygiene habits can reduce the chance of getting influenza or passing it to others. These include regular hand washing, not sharing cups or cutlery and covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze.

### **Flu Infections and Your Child:**

In 2015, nearly one quarter of all reported influenza cases in WA were in children.

Each year, hundreds of children in Australia are admitted to hospital with influenza. Up to 10% of these are admitted to the intensive care unit.

Influenza can be more serious in young children and children with chronic medical conditions, which includes respiratory conditions, heart disease, neurological conditions, kidney or liver problems, diabetes, or lowered immunity.

Warning signs of severe illness include poor feeding, dehydration and difficulty breathing.

### **Influenza Vaccine and Program:**

The best way to prevent influenza is the Flu vaccine. Immunisation against influenza is encouraged for all children, but particularly important for the young and those with chronic disease.

Since 2008, Western Australia has offered free seasonal influenza vaccines to children aged from 6 months to under 5 years and it has now been incorporated as an optional part of the standard childhood immunisation program. This is in addition to free Flu vaccines for children 6 months or older with a medical condition that places them at higher risk of severe influenza.

From 2011 until today, more than 50 000 West Australian children have received influenza vaccines and there have been no safety concerns reported. Side effects of the vaccine include pain and redness at the site of injection. Less commonly, children may develop fever or aches and pains which last one to two days. The vaccine cannot cause influenza as it contains killed or inactivated influenza virus.

Because the influenza virus changes slightly from year to year, you should consider an updated influenza vaccine at the beginning of each influenza season for your children.

### **Monitoring Children after the Vaccine:**

AusVaxSafety is a network of GPs and clinics across Australia which allows parents of children recently given a flu vaccine to report back on how their children felt after vaccination, to ensure vaccines registered for use in children are safe. Parents are asked to provide information by text message about any reactions experienced by their child following vaccination. AusVaxSafety analyses vaccine safety continuously using the information reported.

As of August 2016, 4897 children were followed up under this program with no serious adverse events related to vaccination, 3.9% reporting fever and only 1% reporting side effects which prompted parents to seek medical advice.

Government of Western Australia Department of Health, *Influenza immunisation program*, Available from:

[http://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F\\_1/Influenza-immunisation-program](http://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_1/Influenza-immunisation-program) [10 April 2017]

The Royal Children's Hospital, *Kids Health Info – Influenza (the Flu)*, April 2011, Available from:

[http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Influenza\\_the\\_flu/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Influenza_the_flu/) [10 April 2017]

National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance, *AusVaxSafety*, 2 November 2016, Available from:

[http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact\\_sheets/Influenza\\_the\\_flu/](http://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Influenza_the_flu/) [10 April 2017]