



health

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

To: Editors & Health Journalists  
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### **Health Department urges the public to get the flu vaccine in anticipation of the upcoming influenza season**

**Pretoria:** The Department of Health would like to inform and urge members of the public to take extra precautionary measures to protect themselves and their loved ones against respiratory infections which are expected to increase over the winter season.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is currently at peak circulation in the country, while influenza virus infections are starting to increase. COVID-19 continues to circulate at low levels.

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases has a surveillance system which monitors the circulation of respiratory viruses throughout the country and has notified the department that it is currently the peak season of RSV which can be confused by some people, with COVID-19 or SARS-CoV-2 due to common symptoms. The RSV virus causes illness mainly in young children but also contributes to respiratory illness in older individuals. Influenza virus season usually follows RSV, and we are starting to see an increase in cases.

While most diseases caused by influenza, RSV and SARS-CoV-2 viruses are mild, these viruses may cause severe illness and even death amongst the citizens around the country, particularly in individuals with conditions placing them at high risk of severe disease.

The influenza season is expected to start in the next few weeks and it is advisable for people especially those at high risk of severe influenza (adults aged 65 years and older, people with underlying illness such as heart and lung disease and people living with HIV and tuberculosis, as well as pregnant people) to get the influenza vaccine to prevent severe health complications in case they contract this virus.

Influenza vaccine is available in public clinics free of charge (on first come-first serve basis) to people falling into the above-mentioned risk groups. The vaccine can also be purchased in the private sector at several pharmacies for other people who fall in the

high-risk groups as well as for those who do not fall into one of the risk groups, but who would like to protect themselves from influenza.

The influenza virus spreads mainly from one person to another by respiratory droplets and co-infections with other respiratory viruses can occur, hence it is important for people to always cover their nose and mouth when they cough or sneeze, stay at home when sick, not to touch one's face with unwashed hands; and avoid close contact with others when sick( especially those at risk of severe disease), such as kissing, shaking hands, and sharing cups and eating utensils.

Some of the common symptoms of this respiratory virus, influenza, include, but are not limited to runny nose, decrease in appetite, coughing, sneezing, fever, and wheezing. Parents and caregivers are urged to take their children who experience difficulties with breathing, not drinking enough fluids and experience deteriorating symptoms to the nearest health facility or healthcare providers for medical attention without delay.

People infected with influenza are usually contagious for 3 to 8 days. Preventative measures such as wearing of masks and social distancing are recommended for especially for those who are ill.

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