



Rapid flu tests announced as flu season amps up

Flu diagnosis in NSW hospitals will drop from four days to under four hours following the roll-out of advanced diagnostic technology across NSW.

The roll-out of rapid flu testing technology by NSW Health Pathology in public hospitals comes at a critical time.

Reports of Influenza in NSW are up 50 per cent on this time last year. The most common type is Influenza A (H3N2).

In most of Australia, peak flu season usually runs from August to September.

Rapid flu testing will be available at NSW Health Pathology labs at larger public hospitals including Griffith and Wagga Wagga.

It is important the community takes seriously the risks associated with the winter flu season, according to Murrumbidgee Local Health District.

"The flu season is here and it is important that people, particularly vulnerable people, take care with regard to influenza. The flu virus is

especially dangerous for elderly people, pregnant woman, Aboriginal people, very young children and people with underlying medical conditions," said Acting Director Public Health, Tony Burns.

"Over the past few weeks, there has been an increase in influenza cases in the area notified to the local Public Health Unit, and presenting to the local Emergency Department. We have also seen a number of outbreaks in aged care facilities. In susceptible people, flu symptoms can quickly progress to become life threatening," Mr Burns said.

In general, the flu is worse than a common cold and symptoms such as fever, body aches, extreme tiredness and dry cough are more common and intense, and often start suddenly.

Colds are usually milder than the flu and symptoms generally develop over a longer period.

If you have the flu, or are around someone who does, it's important to take the following steps;

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and running water;

- Turn away from others and cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough and sneeze, if a tissue is not available cough or sneeze into your elbow;

- Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or have a fever;

- Stay at home if you are sick and keep sick children at home from school and other activities.

Mr Burns reminded those visiting friends and family in the hospital or aged care facilities to practice good hand hygiene by using the alcohol based gel or foam provided to reduce the spread of germs.

People who have flu symptoms should postpone visits to hospitals or aged care facilities until they have completely recovered.

Concerned parents and families can seek health advice and information via the free Health Direct Australia service, staffed by registered nurses 24-hours a day, on 1800 022 222.