

HEALTH Team travelling to small towns

Eighth COVID wave sparks rural aged-care booster blitz

Allison Hore

LOCAL pharmacists are hitting the road this Christmas, but not to visit family or friends.

They're travelling to rural and remote areas in the region to make sure aged care residents are up to date with their COVID-19 vaccinations.

The rural aged care blitz by Life Pharmacy Group pharmacists from across the region comes as an eighth wave of COVID-19 threatens festivities for a third year.

"We're going to centres which, quite often, may not have a GP or pharmacy in those towns," Lisa Gibson, owner and pharmacist in charge at Orana Mall Pharmacy Dubbo, said.

"So our stores are offering outreach services to assist the vulnerable patients in those communities that otherwise don't have a health professional to assist with vaccinations."

The new campaign started on Tuesday, December 5, and the pharmacists will be travelling by road and air to centres in Balranald, Bourke, Cobar, Condobolin, Gulgong, Kandos, Mudgee, Orange, Parkes, Rylstone, Wellington, and Yeoval.

"In rural areas there are higher rates of hospitalisation, poorer health outcomes, reduced access to health services and people in aged care are obviously some of our most vulnerable to this virus so we need to

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get them protected," said pharmacist Meagan Gunn.

According to the latest figures, just 38 per cent of aged care residents in Australia are up to date with their vaccinations.

"Reduced vaccination rates are part of the increase in cases, which means people's immunity is wearing off from those boosters that most of us have had, either earlier in the year or in previous years," Ms Gibson said.

"As people come together more frequently towards Christmas and new year, the potential for cluster outbreaks increases."

In a similar initiative in June of this year, the LPG team delivered more than 600 vaccines to aged care residents in remote locations.



Pharmacist Meagan Gunn prepares a vaccine.

"In the aged care homes, some patients can be quite isolated so it's good having someone to have a chat with about their healthcare," Ms Gibson said.

"The pharmacists do enjoy getting out and doing some work in the community as well, and just offering different services and engaging with different patients."

The Australia Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommends that all adults aged 75 years and older should receive an additional COVID-19 booster vaccine dose if six months have passed since their last dose.

ATAGI also advises adults aged 65 to 74

years, and 18 to 64 years who are severely immunocompromised should consider an additional dose if six months have passed since their last dose in consultation with their healthcare provider.

Ms Gunn will continue giving vaccinations at Orana Mall Pharmacy while Ms Gibson is on the road.

"We still need to remain vigilant. NSW is currently experiencing its eighth COVID-19 wave... reports of rates have doubled," she said.

"COVID-19 is definitely still in the community and people are still getting it. We all need to protect ourselves."

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