

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 Dubbo, Forbes, Parkes and Bathurst 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 to deliver the booster shots.

"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 get them protected," pharmacist Meagan Gunn said.

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.

"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 health-care 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."



Senior pharmacist Meagan Gunn prepares a vaccine at the Orana Mall Pharmacy Dubbo. Ms Gunn will continue giving vaccinations at Orana Mall Pharmacy while Ms Gibson is on the road.

Warning issued as temps keep climbing

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AS TEMPERATURES soar the public is being warned that extreme heat can have deadly consequences.

The NSW Department of Health has issued a heatwave warning with temperatures in Dubbo predicted to reach high 30s and low 40s through the week.

Western NSW Local Health District public health director Priscilla Stanley said heat could impact anyone.

But she said older people, people with existing medical conditions, pregnant women, parents of young children, outdoor workers and socially isolated people should be particularly cautious.

"This summer is predicted to be very hot. For a lot of our district this appears to be one of the first real tastes of that extreme weather, so I encourage everyone to take the risk of heat-related illness very seriously," Ms Stanley said.

"Heat can impact anyone and it puts a lot of stress on the body. It can cause dehydration, heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

"These conditions can cause serious illness, hospital admission or even death and extreme heat can also make underlying health conditions worse."

The Bureau of Meteorology is predicting a high of 41 degrees for Dubbo on Friday and 42 on Saturday.

The NSW Department of Health says peo-

ple need to be aware of the signs of heat-related illness including heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Heat exhaustion is your body's response to a loss of water and salt in hot weather, usually through excessive sweating or excessive physical activity.

Heat stroke is the most severe heat-related illness. In extreme heat, your body's ability to cool itself down can fail, causing your body temperature to increase to a dangerous level. If left untreated, it can result in permanent disability or death.

Symptoms include pale skin, headache, nausea or vomiting, dizziness, fainting, weakness, irritability, thirst, heavy sweating, muscle cramps and decreased urine.

If you are concerned about heat stroke, immediately call triple zero (000).

Tips to stay safe in a heatwave

- Avoid being outdoors in the hottest part of the day
- Keep your home cooler by using air-conditioning or electric fans and closing doors, windows, blinds, and curtains
- Limit your physical activity to early in the morning when it's coolest
- Stay hydrated by drinking water regularly. If your doctor has restricted your fluid intake, ask them about how much you should drink when it is hot
- When outdoors, apply sunscreen and wear sunglasses and a wide brim hat

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