

New nasal spray 'flu vax available for children

By SHARON BONTUYS

DID you know a new nasal spray influenza vaccine is now available, providing a needle-free alternative for children?

It's hoped the new form of vaccination will help increase vaccination rates among young Australians, a local pharmacist believes.

"It's always tricky administering needles to young children," managing partner at Orana Mall Pharmacy, Lisa Gibson, said.

"Understandably, not many enjoy the process so this new nasal spray is a needle-free option that can also be co-administered with other routine childhood vaccines," she added.

Under the NSW Nasal Spray Influenza Vaccination Program, the free nasal spray flu vaccine will be available for children aged two, three and four years across NSW through GPs, Aboriginal Medical Services, and community pharmacies. It will be available for a short period of time while NSW Health assesses whether it improves 'flu vaccination rates.

Rates for children six months to under five years in NSW remained low (at 24.4 per cent) in 2025, according to data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

The nasal vaccine, FluMist, has been used in the UK, United States and Europe over the past decade and is reportedly well tolerated and quickly absorbed.

"Last year was a long and dangerous 'flu season in Australia, with thousands of children under the age of five presenting to emer-



Pharmacists and partners at Orana Mall Pharmacy, Lisa Gibson and Mollie-Anne Gersbach, with the nasal spray Influenza vaccination for children. PHOTO: PHARMACY PHUSION

gency departments across NSW with influenza-like illnesses," Lisa said.

"We want to prevent this from happening and protect our youngest members of the community the best way possible."

Adult 'flu vaccinations have now also been updated following last year's 'flu season – the worst on record for our country – which saw Australia record the highest number of deaths involving influenza this century.

There were 502,972 lab-confirmed 'flu cases in 2025, with the ABS recording 1738 deaths from the illness, according to the Royal Australian College of GPs (RACGP).

With 24,800 'flu cases already

reported at the end of March, the RACGP has called on patients to see their GPs and be immunised against influenza.

RACGP President Dr Michael Wright said the high 'flu numbers likely contributed to overwhelmed hospitals and ambulance ramping.

"Last year was a horror 'flu year. That likely contributed to the surge in demand on our hospitals we saw in 2025, and unacceptable ambulance ramping when hospitals couldn't cope as a result," he said.

"No one wants to see that again. Not parents, and not the state and territory governments which run our public hospitals."

Pharmacists like Lisa Gibson agree.

"These [case] numbers are a strong reminder of the risks associated with influenza and respiratory infections, and the importance of protecting infants, the elderly and those most vulnerable in our communities," Lisa concluded.

NSW Minister for Health Ryan Park said he hoped families would take advantage of the free program while it is available.

"I know how unsettling it can be for some parents taking a child to receive a vaccine, so being able to offer a needle-free alternative is a real win for those parents," the Minister said.

"We hope this option will help increase vaccine uptake in this age group, who we know are at higher risk of becoming more seriously unwell from influenza."