



Urgent

Influenza outbreak in Port Stephens

We are having a significantly worse than normal flu season and have had some very sick patients with the flu.

Tests on our patients have shown that Influenza A and B and Parainfluenza virus are all doing the rounds.

We have seen a significant number of people who have had this year's flu vaccine who have still got the flu. This suggests that maybe some of the circulating strains of virus are different to those in the flu vaccine. We don't have proof of that yet.

Flu generally causes fevers, sweats, aches, sore throat, nasal congestion and cough. Headache, vomiting and weakness are also common features but the virus affects people differently and not everybody will have a 'full house' of symptoms.

What do I do if I get flu?

The mainstay of treatment is supportive - lots of fluids, simple painkillers or chemists cough and flu tablets and plenty of rest. These treatments make you feel better but don't shorten the course of the illness.

We can prescribe antiviral treatment (Tamiflu tablets) which should be considered for anyone presenting with moderate or severe illness, and for those presenting with mild illness and who are from a vulnerable group at risk of severe illness eg. people with chronic disease (heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes etc) or chest problems.

Tamiflu can be given to anyone over the age of 1 and to pregnant women who are known to be particularly prone to severe and complicated flu. **Some people want to take Tamiflu just because they want to get back to work quicker and that is perfectly reasonable.**

Anti-influenza treatment with Tamiflu should be initiated as soon as possible after the onset of symptoms. Evidence for benefits from treatment in studies of influenza is strongest when treatment is started **within 48 hours** of illness onset.

Tamiflu is not a magic wand but has been shown to shorten the duration of the illness by a few days on average.

Prevention of flu in household contacts

Flu is spread by droplets (coughing) or touching contaminated surfaces eg. door handles. Keep your distance from the patient and isolate them as far as possible, wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol based hand sanitiser. Clean surfaces and door handles with an antiseptic product. If you have to be in close contact with a family member with flu (eg. driving) get them to wear a face mask.

Tamiflu can be taken by close contacts of flu victims as prevention and should be strongly considered if the contact is at high risk of complications (see above).

A course of Tamiflu for treatment or prevention costs about \$45 and is only available on prescription. If the outbreak grows it may become difficult to obtain.

What about vaccination, am I too late?

Immunisation is not too late. We have a limited supply of a few private and government vaccines (for eligible patients) left to give on a first come first serve basis.

Although the vaccine does not protect against all strains it is effective against most strains.

We would particularly urge unvaccinated patients going on cruises, bus trips or aeroplane flights to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Every plane flight, every bus trip and every cruise is likely to have a few passengers with flu who are infectious to others and our experience is that air travel, bus trips and cruises are very high risk when it comes to the spread of flu and other viruses.

At the Surgery

We are busier than normal (and doctors and nurses get sick too) but we will do our best to see flu patients who feel sick enough to be seen and all patients who want Tamiflu for treatment or prevention.

Remember Tamiflu is only really effective if it is taken early in the course of the illness **so you need to tell reception staff you think you have flu and they will get you seen.**

If you want an immunisation, book in with the nurses - no need to see a doctor. Again, we will squeeze you in urgently if you, for example, are travelling overseas soon.

Could everyone who has a flu like illness please wear a face mask when they arrive at the surgery (which we will provide) and if possible wait outside until they are called. This protects our staff and also other patients in the waiting room who may be particularly vulnerable to flu infection or its complications.

Thank you for your attention.

The Doctors | Shoal Bay and Anna Bay Medical Centres

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