

CONSTITUENT QUESTION

House of Assembly

ASKED BY: Hon Jacquie Petrusma MP

ANSWERED BY: Hon Guy Barnett MP



QUESTION:

Given we are now in winter, we are all seeing instances of winter and respiratory illnesses on the rise, which is bringing some fear and anxiety back into our communities. On behalf of the older and vulnerable Tasmanians in my electorate of Franklin, I wish to ask for more information on what plans and strategies are in place by the Tasmanian government to help protect our most vulnerable. What is being done to protect Tasmanians by encouraging and maximising vaccination rates, particularly for COVID-19 and influenza?

ANSWER:

This is a key priority for the Department of Health and I can advise the 2024 Winter Strategy and Plan is well underway to support the management of acute respiratory illness during the 2024 winter season. There is also a dedicated communication campaign to support the objectives of the 2024 Winter Strategy; the Winter Wellness campaign.

Through this Winter Wellness campaign, Tasmanians are being urged to prepare, plan and protect themselves and their families this winter from severe illness. With respiratory infections increasing through the colder months, there are simple actions Tasmanians can take to protect themselves.

The Department of Health is keeping Tasmanians informed about current acute respiratory illness activity in the community, and associated steps to take, through weekly activity updates and publication of the detailed RespTas report on the Department of Health webpage.

The best thing Tasmanians can do to prepare is stay up to date with their vaccinations, as this remains the best defence against serious illness from COVID-19, influenza and RSV.

Everyone aged six months and older is recommended to receive an annual flu vaccine, which is particularly important for those at higher risk of serious illness from flu.

All adults are eligible for a COVID-19 booster at least every 12 months, and older adults or those with severe immunocompromise should get one every six months. I can also advise that a vaccine is now recommended for older individuals to protect against severe illness from RSV.

Through the Winter Wellness campaign, Tasmanians are being advised that they can 'prepare' by receiving their annual flu, COVID-19 and RSV vaccines from GPs and most local pharmacies.

The Department of Health continues to monitor vaccination coverage, particularly among priority populations, to inform vaccination programs and policy.

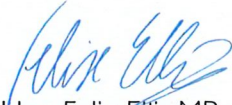
Tasmanians at higher risk of serious illness for acute respiratory illness are being encouraged to 'plan' by ensuring they have an up to date plan with their GP about how they will access testing and access to antiviral medications if they become unwell. Tasmanians continue to be able to access Care@Home, which offers virtual care to high-risk people with COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.

The Department of Health continues to work with high risk settings, including Residential Aged Care Homes, to prepare and respond to outbreaks of acute respiratory infections.

I would also urge Tasmanian to keep up the simple behaviours that have kept us safe in recent years, such as staying at home if you're unwell, covering coughs and sneezes, and regularly washing your hands.

Importantly, our hospital and health system is prepared to manage expected peaks in demand, applying the learnings from previous years.

☒ APPROVED ☐ NOT APPROVED



Hon Felix Ellis MP

Acting Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing

Date: 10/7/2024

