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Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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THE FACTS ON SWINE FLU

Australians must be prepared for possible outbreaks of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza – or swine flu – as we move into the Southern Hemisphere flu season.

Since the beginning of this year there have been almost 50 confirmed cases of swine flu in Australia.

To help people understand the risks swine flu poses to the community, and the need for all people to get vaccinated, the Australian Government is launching the '*Facts about Swine Flu*' campaign.

These simple facts demonstrate that this is no ordinary flu. It affects younger, healthier people. In 2009, there were 37,636 cases, including 191 associated deaths. The median age of those dying was 53 years, compared to 83 years for seasonal influenza.

Having people vaccinated now, before the flu season starts, will allow us to have an orderly vaccination program and avoid undue pressure on vaccination providers that could happen if people delay their vaccination until winter or until they see a rise in cases.

As at 5 March there were 5003 hospitalisations, 682 ICU admissions associated with swine flu in Australia.

Armed with these facts about what happened in Australia last year I am urging people, particularly parents, to get the swine flu vaccine for themselves and their families now. It's safe, it's effective and it's free for everyone six months and older.

Fact 1: 30% of Australians in intensive care with swine flu in 2009 were healthy before getting the virus.

Fact 2: Over half the hospital admissions for swine flu in 2009 were under 35 years of age.

Fact 3: More than one-third of the Australians who died of swine flu in 2009 were healthy before getting the virus.

Fact 4: Babies under 6 months can't be vaccinated against swine flu. To protect them, parents should vaccinate themselves and others around them.

Fact 5: Compared to seasonal flu, more healthy young people have been severely affected by swine flu.

Fact 6: Compared to the seasonal flu, many more adults and children under 10 have been admitted to hospital with swine flu.

Fact 7: It is particularly important to vaccinate children, teenagers and young adults as swine flu spreads more easily in these age groups.

Fact 8: Because of children's close interactions with others at childcare and schools, swine flu can spread quickly, harming individuals and families.

Fact 9: Vaccinating school age children against swine flu will help reduce the chance of school-based outbreaks.

Press, magazine and radio advertising will start today (Sunday 21 March) in all major metropolitan and regional media and run until 30 May.

Protection against swine flu is included in the 2010 seasonal flu vaccine but supplies are primarily targeted at risk groups, including pregnant women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 64 years, people aged six months to 64 years with chronic medical conditions such as cardiac disease and respiratory conditions and people aged 65 years and over.

The free Panvax®H1N1 will continue to be provided to all Australians six months and older during the 2010 flu season.

For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220.

People wanting information on pandemic (H1N1) 2009 vaccination, or to view the advertising material, should visit www.healthemergency.gov.au