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## South Eastern Sydney Local Health District Urges Pregnant Women to Get Flu Shot

With the start of winter South Eastern Sydney Local Health District is reminding pregnant women about the importance of getting their influenza vaccination.

Professor Mark Ferson, Director of the South Eastern Sydney Public Health Unit, said the number of flu cases reported in South Eastern Sydney residents is well above usual levels for this time of year, making it even more important for pregnant women to take advantage of the free influenza vaccine.

“Influenza can be dangerous for pregnant women, who are at greater risk of developing serious complications, such as pneumonia, which may result in their hospitalisation,” Professor Ferson said.

“We are concerned that pregnant women in South Eastern Sydney are being hospitalised each year as a result of flu-related illnesses, including some being admitted to the intensive care unit.”

The risk of premature labour and delivery is also increased in pregnant women with influenza.

Only 32 per cent of pregnant women in NSW are being vaccinated for the flu compared with about 70 per cent of people aged 65 years and older across the state.

“Influenza in babies can also be serious; as vaccines are not available for children less than six months of age, protection can only be achieved by vaccinating a mother during pregnancy,” Professor Ferson said.

“Children born to vaccinated mothers have a reduced risk of contracting influenza in the first six months of life, whilst the mothers are also protected from severe forms of the infection.

“The influenza vaccine can be given at any stage of pregnancy. It’s **safe and free for pregnant women so speak to your GP today.**”

There are some simple precautions which pregnant women can take to minimise the risk of developing influenza including:

- wash your hands regularly, cover coughs and sneezes. Encourage others to do so as well.
- Ask sick people to keep away until they are well.
- If you start to feel sick, call your doctor straight away. Early treatment of flu can help prevent complications.
- Treat fever straight away. Fever can harm your unborn baby.

For more information on protecting yourself from influenza during pregnancy please go to the following link on the NSW Health website:

[http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/Influenza/Pages/influenza\\_and\\_pregnancy.aspx](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/Influenza/Pages/influenza_and_pregnancy.aspx)

The National Seasonal Influenza Program for 2015 commenced on 20 April 2015.

The annual seasonal influenza vaccination is recommended for any person aged six months or older.