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## **Flu vaccinations now available – help protect your whanau from flu this winter**

Flu vaccinations are now available at medical centres and some pharmacies in the Wairarapa.

Local doctors are urging people to get vaccinated to help protect against this serious illness, particularly following a severe flu season in the northern hemisphere.

“This year could be particularly bad for winter illnesses,” said Carterton GP Annie Lincoln. “A flu vaccination is one of the best ways to stay well during winter and avoid the spread of flu in the wider community.”

A recent study found that around 25 percent of the population get the flu virus each year with about 4 out of 5 people (80 percent) showing no symptoms.

“This means you could be spreading the flu virus without knowing it or being unwell,” Dr Lincoln said. “Having a flu vaccination not only helps to protect you from this highly contagious disease – it also helps to keep your family, friends and co-workers well too.”

This year’s vaccine provides protection against the strain that caused the severe illness in the northern hemisphere during the recent winter there.

Wairarapa DHB Chief Medical Officer Tom Gibson suggested locals book a vaccination before the onset of colder weather.

“Now is the best time to have a vaccination, before winter arrives, to ensure you’re protected before the flu season starts.”

Flu vaccinations are free for pregnant women, for those aged over 65 and for people with certain medical conditions including children aged under 5 with respiratory conditions. People can contact their local medical centre to check if they’re eligible and to book an appointment. Flu vaccinations will also be available at a number of Wairarapa pharmacies this year.

Local workplaces are also being encouraged to offer flu vaccinations to their staff.

“Vaccinating your staff is a good way of keeping them well during winter and your business operating,” said Dr Gibson.

Wairarapa medical centres did flu vaccinations at over 100 workplaces last year, with businesses ranging from supermarkets to vet practices, schools and timber yards offering vaccinations to their staff. Other businesses provided vouchers to their staff to get a flu vaccination at their local medical centre.

Dr Lincoln also urged locals to get 'winter ready' by checking they have a ready supply of regular medication, including asthma inhalers.

"If you or someone in your family gets asthma or has COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), now is the time to check you have inhalers ready to use if you need them," Dr Lincoln said. "Make sure you have a good supply at home, in your bag and at work or school. Contact your local medical centre nurse if you need a refresher on how to use your or your child's inhaler."

Ends

***Photo caption: Carterton Medical Centre practice nurse Corina Ngatai with Masterton resident Mere Kerehi. Local doctors are urging people to book in for a flu vaccination to help stay well this winter.***

***Workplace vaccinations will take place from 16<sup>th</sup> April. A photo opportunity with Mitre 10 will be offered in the week of the 23<sup>rd</sup> April.***

**For more information contact:**

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**Fast flu facts**

- Influenza (flu) is a serious illness that can put anyone in hospital and be fatal, even for young and healthy people.
- Typical cold symptoms like cough, headache, running nose, muscle pain and fever are more severe with flu. Flu develops suddenly and can last for up to 10 days.
- Pregnant women and their babies can suffer serious consequences as a result of getting the flu. Older people and those with certain medical conditions are more likely to have medical complications from the flu.
- Flu is very contagious and easily spread through breathing, coughing and sneezing. The flu virus survives for 48 hours on surfaces such as door handles and 6 hours on hands.
- Immunisation is one of the best ways to help protect against getting the flu. Other tips include:
  - Hygiene – wash and dry your hands thoroughly.
  - Keep coughs and sneezes covered. Put tissues in the bin or plastic bag.