

Question on Notice

No. 504

Asked on 21 May 2020

MS S BOLTON asked the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services (HON DR S MILES) –

QUESTION

With reference to Queenslanders' concerns about flu vaccinations—

Will the Deputy Premier explain the rationale for the specific vaccination requirements for work and aged care visits when the risk is reportedly to those who choose not to be vaccinated themselves, rather than those who are vaccinated?

ANSWER

Influenza vaccination is particularly important for elderly people as they are at particular risk of both infection with and complications from influenza and also have the highest influenza-associated death rates each year. While influenza vaccination uptake is very high in the elderly, the elderly people most vulnerable to influenza are those who cannot receive the influenza vaccine themselves because of medical contraindications and those who despite vaccination are unable to develop an adequate immune response to influenza after vaccination.

This year, elderly people are also at significant risk from COVID-19 infection. While vaccination against influenza will not protect against COVID-19, being vaccinated against influenza will reduce the potential of two serious respiratory infections occurring at the same time.

On 18 March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a range of actions was agreed to by the National Cabinet to protect the Australian community from the spread of coronavirus. One of these actions was to place restrictions on entry to residential aged care facilities for all persons, which included the requirement for staff and visitors who attend or visit one of these facilities to have a current influenza vaccination by 1 May 2020. In Queensland, this requirement is currently in place until the end of the declared public health emergency. It is not designed to be a permanent change.

Specifically, *Queensland's Aged Care Direction No. 5*, paragraph 6 (e) requires that a person must not enter, or remain on, the premises of a residential aged care facility in the State of Queensland if after 1 May 2020, the person does not have an up-to-date vaccination against influenza, if the vaccination is available to the person. The term 'available' offers some flexibility to allow for circumstances where a person is attempting to get vaccinated but is unable to obtain the vaccine (for example if their GP is waiting on stock to arrive) or has a valid medical reason for not being vaccinated. In these circumstances, the vaccination is deemed not 'available' to them and the exclusion does not apply.