

EMBARGOED UNTIL: Friday, 1 June 2018

OUR HOSPITALS ARE READY TO TACKLE WINTER

With the start of Winter, hospitals across the Illawarra Shoalhaven region will again boost staff numbers and put in place additional measures for the busy period.

Margot Mains, Chief Executive of Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, said the District is investing more than \$2.1 million in strategies to manage increased patient demand over Winter, including recruiting an extra 52 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff.

“We also have procedures in place for opening additional beds during periods of high demand during Winter to ensure patients go through emergency as quickly as possible,” Ms Mains said.

“In addition we will ensure we have extra staff for the season for when any workers become ill themselves.”

Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District experienced a significant rise in demand in the 2017 winter period. From July to September alone, more than 40,000 people presented to EDs across the District, an increase of 3,000 people or eight per cent on the previous year.

Ms Mains reminded the community to visit their GP for treatment of less serious illnesses to ensure emergency departments are freed-up for emergencies.

The NSW Government is spending a record \$22.75 million on state-wide immunisation programs in 2017-18. This includes \$3.5 million for free flu shots to children up to five years of age and a \$1.75 million immunisation and influenza prevention campaign.

The District has been working with the Primary Health Network and Residential Aged Care Facilities to help them prepare and educate staff and patients about preventative measures to stay healthy during winter.

Illawarra Shoalhaven LHD has strongly encouraged its own staff to get their flu shots and so far 3,860 LHD staff have been vaccinated. Another 60 vaccination sessions are scheduled for staff to access flu shots across the District in June.

NSW Health has made the flu vaccine mandatory for staff who work in Intensive Care Units (ICUs) and cancer, transplant, neonatal and birth/labour wards in the state’s public health facilities, to protect our most vulnerable from the flu.

Annual vaccination is the best protection against the flu, but the following steps also help prevent the spread of influenza:

- Cough and sneeze into your elbow
- Clean your hands
- Stay home when sick