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OUR HOSPITALS ARE READY TO TACKLE WINTER

With the start of winter, hospitals across the Northern Sydney region are implementing additional measures with stand-by influenza clinics and additional staff.

Deb Willcox, Chief Executive of Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD), said every winter hospitals had plans in place including additional clinical staff, and flu clinics if needed, to reduce demand on emergency departments.

“The winter months are a busy time for any hospital and our focus is always to ensure our patients receive the very best care,” Ms Willcox said.

“We have extra staff ready to assist with the seasonal demand and also to cover any of our workers who may fall ill over the period.”

NSLHD experienced a significant rise in activity in the 2017 winter period. From July to September alone, 55,822 people presented to emergency departments across the district, an increase of over 5,400 people or almost 11 per cent on the previous year.

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

To further ensure health staff are prepared for patient demand, the district has invested in systems to monitor and manage patient activity.

This new measure allows staff to monitor patterns of patient admissions so they can predict when they may need to open additional beds to help avoid delays.

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.

NSLHD has strongly encouraged its own staff to get their flu shots and so far more than 4,300 staff have been vaccinated.

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 the most vulnerable people from the flu.

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

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