Flu vax for you and me, for free

By Elle Cecil

Victorians will be eligible to receive their annual flu shot for free until Thursday, June 30, after flu cases in the state rose more than 30 per cent in just one week.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a reduced immunity to common viruses including influenza, with flu cases rising from 10,000 to 15,000 in Victoria during the last week of May.

The vaccine is already free for children aged under five, people aged 65 and over, pregnant women, people with increased-risk medical conditions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The state government initiative will reimburse GPs and community pharmacies for influenza vaccines administered to people not usually eligible for a free vaccine.

Immunisation providers will also be offered $2000 grants to assist in managing additional demand, including the costs of rostering more staff and extending opening hours.

More than 3000 Victorian GPs and community pharmacies have been invited to take part under a $33 million package, aimed at boosting vaccination coverage and avoiding more hospitalisations during winter.

"This will be the first time in two years that we will face a real flu season - we need all Victorians to roll up their sleeves and help protect their loved ones and our health system by getting vaccinated," Health Minister Martin Foley said.

With no interval required between receiving the flu and COVID vaccines, Victorians are encouraged to ensure their vaccinations, both influenza and COVID, are up to date for the winter season.

"Victorians really took up the call to arms when it came to COVID-19 vaccinations, and we know they can do it again - so we're removing as many barriers as possible to help boost vaccine coverage," Mr Foley said.

"Help your family stay safe this winter by getting vaccinated for both the flu and COVID-19, getting tested if you have any symptoms and staying home while unwell."

Victorians can book their free flu vaccines by contacting their local GP or community pharmacy.

Emerging writers star

A pair of performance-based writers will wow audiences at the Melbourne Planetarium as part of the Emerging Writers Festival.

In partnership with Scienceworks, the Writing the Stars event will be held on Thursday, June 23, with sessions at 7.30pm and 9pm.

Thabani Tshuma and Bella Waru will be performing special pieces following a feature film screening in the Planetarium dome.

Mr Tshuma said he is fostering an infatuation with stars to prepare for the event, including watching episodes of Star Trek and other science fiction media.

"My latest obsession has been with the stars," he said.

Mr Tshuma said he is working in performance and slam poetry, but his work is always evolving.

"I'm very jazz about it," he said.

Mr Tshuma said he was looking forward to being involved in the festival for a third time.

"It's always been such a wholesome place to get involved with," Mr Tshuma said.

A group of three writers will also share their thoughts about what attracts them to write about the west.

Jinghua Qian, Harry Reid and Khalid Warsame will present as part of the Writing the West workshop at the Footscray library on Tuesday, June 21 from 6pm until 7pm.

The festival will also include the launch of a multi-disciplinary exhibition named Same River Twice.

Same River Twice is an outcome of Footscray Community Arts West Writers program and is presented in partnership with Footscray Community Arts.

The exhibition is running from Wednesday, June 15 to Sunday, July 3 at 45 Moreland Street in Footscray, while the launch will be held on Tuesday, June 21 from 7.30pm.

Matthew Sims

Thabani Tshuma is presenting in the Writing the Stars event. (Supplied)

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