Dear Director of Care / Facility Manager

RE:  INFLUENZA OUTBREAKS IN RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES

Influenza activity has been steadily increasing in South Australia over recent weeks, and the number of cases is likely to continue to rise as we move further into the influenza season - please see the link to SA Health influenza charts at: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/SurveillanceNotifiableConditions

As you are aware, residential care facilities are particularly susceptible to outbreaks of influenza. An influenza management plan for your facility helps to ensure you are prepared for an outbreak, should it occur. As part of ongoing actions for the influenza season, we recommend you review your existing plan or develop a management plan if you do not have one.

It is recommended that residential care facilities report any suspected outbreak of influenza to SA Health Communicable Disease Control Branch (CDCB) during office hours via telephone 1300 232 272 or fax 08 82267187. An outbreak may be suspected if your facility has three or more people (residents/staff) with influenza-like illness within a three-day time period.

Immunisation remains the most effective action in preventing the spread of influenza and should be promoted for all staff and residents. Immunising staff will minimise the risk of illness in staff and absenteeism, and it will also reduce the risk of transmission of the influenza virus to residents.

The Commonwealth government has mandated that all Australian Government-subsidised providers of residential aged care have in place a flu vaccination program. Further details can be obtained from: https://agedcare.health.gov.au/mandatory-influenza-flu-vaccination-program-for-residential-aged-care-providers

In the event of an outbreak, strengthening infection control practices and providing appropriate information for visitors will limit the spread of disease.

For advice on managing influenza outbreaks, please refer to the following documents available from the Commonwealth Department of Health website (www.health.gov.au):
SA Health has a number of helpful web pages with links to relevant guidelines and resources:

- SA Health influenza (seasonal) web page for health professionals: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/influenza - see the “Related Resources Section” on this web page for access to the SA Health Guideline for Influenza Outbreak Prevention and Management in Residential Care Facilities in SA.
- A public health information entitled ‘Responding to influenza in South Australia’ was sent to medical practitioners on 13 May 2019. This provides information on immunisation and use of anti-viral medications – see www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/healthalerts
- For your facility influenza stations, new ‘Cover Your Cough’ posters are now available (shown below). Navigate to the Wash, Wipe, Cover resources and see the “Related Resources Section” (right-hand side panel): www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/washwipecover

To obtain further advice about influenza outbreak prevention or management, please review SA Health information available at www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/flu or, for urgent matters or to report an influenza outbreak, please the contact Communicable Disease Control Branch (CDCB) SA Health by phone 1300 232 272 during office hours.

Yours sincerely

Dr Louise Flood
Director
COMMUNICABLE DISEASE CONTROL BRANCH
30 / 05 / 2019