**Australia 2023 – Brace for Potential Early Flu Season**

Heading into the 2023 flu season and observing the elongated flu season which has developed in the Northern Hemisphere, the Australian Government has started the conversation early to encourage influenza vaccination uptake. In hindsight, the concerns over a more intense flu season in 2022 were proven valid. However, due to an earlier flu season and a lower vaccine uptake in the earlier months of 2022 we saw the worst number of influenza cases in five years.

A recent article in NewsGP, 2023 indicates that as a consequence of the pandemic causing unpredictable changes in influenza patterns, the Northern Hemisphere may provide insight on the months ahead. Given Australian influenza epidemics are [typically sparked by returned overseas travellers](https://journals.plos.org/plospathogens/article?id=10.1371/journal.ppat.1006780#sec007),  reviewing the Northern Hemisphere flu season often provide a glimpse into what Australia can expect early this year.

Professor Ian Barr, Deputy Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Influenza at the Doherty Institute suggests that if the Northern Hemisphere has a rebound flu season, cases in Australia might once again spike earlier than usual. He also said that we also need to take a view of what’s going on in the region. There is currently an outbreak of influenza in Fiji. The WHO [announced its recommendation](https://www.who.int/news/item/23-09-2022-new-recommendations-for-the-composition-of-influenza-vaccines-in-2023-for-the-southern-hemisphere) for which strains should be included in the 2023 Southern Hemisphere influenza vaccines last September, providing an impetus for Australia to prepare for our upcoming season.

However, while Professor Barr says having vaccines ready for an early season would be advantageous, he is unsure whether they will be ready in time. ‘Last year, the flu vaccine wasn’t available until April and so only a small proportion of people were vaccinated as there was a rise in cases,’ he said. ‘Hopefully this year it will be available earlier.’  
   
Meanwhile, [trials by Novavax continue](https://ir.novavax.com/2022-12-30-Novavax-Announces-Initiation-of-Phase-2-Trial-for-COVID-19-Influenza-Combination-and-Stand-Alone-Influenza-Vaccine-Candidates) in Australia and New Zealand for a combined COVID and influenza vaccine. [Moderna are also making](https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/one-and-done-moderna-could-make-combined-covid-19-flu-jab-in-melbourne-20220620-p5av3n.html) a combination vaccine. This will **NOT** be available in 2023.

**Reference:** *newsGP* is the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners news hub, designed to keep Australian GPs informed about the latest in general practice.