COMMUNITY COVID-19 UPDATE JULY 2022

The COVID-19 virus continues to change and two new strains of Omicron (called BA4 and BA5) are quickly becoming the main type of COVID-19 in our community. We are seeing many more people get COVID-19, including people who have already had Omicron. The number of people who have to go to hospital is also growing quickly. To keep yourself, your family and your community safe, please remember these three things: **PROTECT**, **PREPARE** and **CONNECT TO CARE**.

HOW IS OMICRON BA4/BA5 DIFFERENT?

The BA4/BA5 strains are quite new, so scientists are still learning about them. What we have seen so far is that:

- BA4/5 is MUCH easier to catch
- Even if you have had other forms of COVID-19, you can still get infected with BA4/5
- People most at risk of serious illness include people over 65, people who have other medical conditions and adults aged 50+ who are not fully vaccinated or who had their last dose more than 4 months ago.

DOES VACCINATION WORK AGAINST BA4/BA5?

Yes, especially if you are fully vaccinated. Most people who are in hospital have not had all their doses of COVID-19 vaccine. While the vaccination may not stop you from getting COVID-19, it does protect you from getting very sick.

HOW MANY DOSES DO I NEED?

The vaccine protection against COVID gets less over time. A booster dose helps increase your protection again. Full vaccination now means:

- a third dose for people aged 16 – 49 who have only had two doses
- a fourth (winter) dose for people aged 50+ who had their third dose, or who had COVID-19, more than three months ago.
- a fourth (winter) dose for people aged 16+ with disability, significant or complex health needs.

People aged 30+ can also get a fourth (winter) dose for extra protection.

WHERE CAN I GET VACCINATED?

The NEPHU Facebook page (@NEPHUMelbourne) lists all vaccination sites in our area. You can also call 1800 675 398 to find a clinic near you and make an appointment.

HOW DO I PROTECT MYSELF AND MY FAMILY?

There are three things you can do to protect against infection and serious illness:

1. Get a third dose of vaccine if you haven't had it yet
2. Get a fourth (Winter) dose if you are over 30 years old
3. Wear a mask when you are outside your home.

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR GETTING COVID-19?

Because it is so easy to catch, everyone should prepare for infection. Treatment (such as tablets) is also available to many people, so there are three ways you can prepare:

1. Understand your risk. You are most at risk of serious illness if you:
    - are 65 or older
    - have lung problems (including asthma), heart disease or other health problems
    - have diabetes or are very overweight
    - have a weak immune system
2. If you are at high risk, develop a COVID treatment plan with your doctor
3. Get tested early so you can get treatment early.

HOW DO I CONNECT TO CARE IF I GET COVID-19?

Three ways to connect to care if you get COVID-19:

1. Register a positive RAT result – this helps you get the information, care and support you need.
2. If you are sick, contact your doctor, Nurse-on-call (1300 606 024) or a GP Respiratory Clinic (find a clinic near you at www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/coronavirus-covid-19-gp-respiratory-clinics)
3. Go to hospital if you have severe symptoms or they get worse very quickly. Severe symptoms include finding it hard to breathe, chest pain, dizziness or fainting, or coughing up blood.

INFORMATION PREPARED BY:

NEPHU NORTH EASTERN PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT

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