

FLU — VACCINATION

369. Mr T.J. HEALY to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's efforts to mitigate the impact of influenza on our state's health system.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on this government's efforts to maximise the number of Western Australians who are protected against the flu this winter?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how vaccinating against influenza is an important way we can all protect ourselves and vulnerable people in the community?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Southern River for his question. We all know that the best protection against the flu and COVID is vaccination. Although we have some of the strongest, highest vaccination rates for COVID around the country, and in fact around the world, we are certainly nowhere near as close to the numbers for COVID with our flu vaccinations. The level of flu in the community is concerning, which I think is testament to some of the absences in this chamber this week. In fact, we are experiencing very high numbers of flu cases. To date, 2009 flu notifications for children aged under 10 years have been lodged this year alone. In the last reporting week, flu notifications for this age group increased by 67 per cent. Flu notifications for kids are climbing up.

The strains that are currently circulating are AH1 and influenza b, which are different from the predominantly influenza AH3 strain that we saw last year. This year's vaccination covers all those three strains. That is why the government committed \$15 million to ensure Western Australians have access to free flu vaccinations for the month of May. We have extended that for the month of June. I remind and encourage people to get their free flu vaccination.

As of 10 June, a total of 557 882 free flu jabs were delivered under this program. That included the bulk of those for people aged between 12 and 64 years. It is still slightly lower than last year, though. The program will run until the end of the month. I strongly encourage everyone to take up their free flu vax and get their COVID booster at the same time. Normally, the program is open to the vulnerable cohort in the community—namely, children under five, people 65 and older, pregnant women and those with complications—but it is free for every Western Australian. It is very easy to do. You just walk into a pharmacy or make an appointment at your GP clinic for yourself and your children. A reminder that pharmacists can vaccinate children over five years old. I took my son who is seven to the pharmacy to get vaccinated at absolutely no cost. I remind everyone of the importance of flu vaccinations and making sure you protect yourself and your families.