

Cairns Public Health Unit

Monthly surveillance update – July 2026

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Influenza activity remains low – it's not too late to vaccinate!

- Influenza notifications have not yet started to increase, despite being in the usual peak influenza season. This may be due to the unusual peak of influenza in October 2025, which may have delayed the timing of the seasonal peak this year.
- Major community events, including the Cairns Show and other regional are expected to increase opportunities for respiratory virus transmission due to large gatherings.
- Vaccination remains the most effective measure to prevent severe illness, hospitalisation, and complications, particularly among young children, older adults, pregnant women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people with underlying medical conditions.
- Clinicians are encouraged to promote and offer free influenza vaccination to all people over 6 months old, particularly priority groups, and use routine consultations to opportunistically check vaccination status before community transmission increases

Avian influenza confirmed in Australia – risk to public health low

- As of 6 July, Australia had 6 confirmed H5N1 avian influenza detections in wild migratory seabirds: 4 in Western Australia, 1 in South Australia, and 1 in New South Wales.
- All detections have been in migratory seabirds (primarily giant petrels and brown skuas), with no evidence of sustained transmission in native wild birds, poultry, captive birds, or livestock.
- The risk to public health remains low. There have been no human cases of this strain of avian influenza in Australia.
- Human infection can occur after close contact with infected poultry – for example, chickens, ducks, turkeys, geese – or contaminated environments.
- It remains safe to eat properly handled, prepared and cooked meat and eggs.
- Getting an annual flu vaccination is important. Although it does not protect against avian influenza it:
 - Reduces the risk of getting sick with human flu and bird flu at the same time
 - Reduces the risk of common human flu viruses and avian flu viruses mixing to create a more dangerous virus
 - It is especially important for any of your patients who are poultry workers or otherwise at [greater risk of exposure](#) for this reason.

Potential rabies and ABLV exposures at 5 year high

- Potential rabies exposure notifications have reached the highest year-to-date level observed in the past five years post-Covid.
- The increase is mainly associated with overseas exposures, particularly dog bites or scratches in [rabies-endemic countries](#), with increased bat-handling incidents in Australia also contributing.

- While Australia remains free of terrestrial rabies, Australian bat lyssavirus (ABLV) is endemic in Australian bats and can cause a disease clinically indistinguishable from rabies. Any bat bite or scratch requires health assessment and consideration of post-exposure prophylaxis.
- Consider pre-exposure rabies vaccination for travellers who may be at increased risk of mammalian exposure in rabies-endemic countries.

Ebola Virus Disease – low risk to Queensland

- An outbreak of Ebola virus disease (EVD) has been reported in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and a small part of Uganda, and is being closely monitored by Australian public health authorities.
- The risk to the QLD community remains very low, with no increased risk to the general public.
- Queensland Health has established preparedness and response arrangements in place to rapidly identify, assess and manage any suspected cases.
- Clinicians should consider EVD only in patients with compatible clinical symptoms and a relevant epidemiological risk, such as recent travel to an affected area and potential exposure.
- Suspected cases should be seen by telehealth if possible.
- Please notify the Public Health Unit and Infectious Diseases immediately if you have a suspected case for advice on testing and infection prevention control.

New single dose of pneumococcal 21 vaccine

- A new pneumococcal vaccine is recommended and NIP funded for:
 - All people aged 65 yrs and over
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25 yrs and over
 - People aged 18 yrs and over with certain risk conditions

<https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/pneumococcal-disease>

- Please take the opportunity of providing this new vaccine to any patients presenting to you
- This is a new vaccine. Everyone who is eligible should receive a single dose of 21vPCV regardless of any previous pneumococcal vaccination (provided at least 12 months have passed since a previous pneumococcal dose).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Cairns Public Health Unit can be contacted on:
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