



**Brad Hazzard**  
Minister for Health and Medical Research

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **COMMUNITY URGED TO HELP PREVENT CORONAVIRUS**

The NSW Government is asking individuals and businesses to take steps to prepare for a possible COVID-19 pandemic converging with winter flu in the coming months.

Health Minister Brad Hazzard and Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant said NSW Health has planned extensively for a pandemic and further strengthened its response since the SARS, MERS and H1N1 “swine flu” threats, but everyone plays a role in prevention.

“Simple hygiene measures like regular hand washing, sneezing into your elbow and, most importantly, staying home when sick, will not only help ease ED presentations for flu but also support existing COVID-19 pandemic plans,” Mr Hazzard said.

“Businesses also need to review their continuity plans now. Look at strategies for keeping workers safe with simple measures such as alcohol hand rub in the workplace, stress the importance of staying home when sick, and use technologies that allow people to work from home where necessary.

“We also ask everyone to please see your GP for minor illnesses and injuries where possible, to ensure we keep our EDs for emergencies only, particularly as we head into the busy flu season.”

Dr Chant said the emergence of community spread of COVID-19 in multiple countries outside mainland China demonstrates how quickly the virus can pass from person to person and, because it can present as mild disease, how preventing its spread can be challenging.

“We know from managing past pandemics, including influenza, that unless everyone is onboard from the start – government, business and the community – it makes our task that much harder,” Dr Chant said.

“We have been prudently planning and regularly reviewing everything from ED and intensive care capacity, staff capacity and training and supplies of critical medical equipment to streamlining how we manage patients with acute respiratory illness.

“While the few COVID-19 cases in NSW to date have been mild, the global spread of the virus, coupled with flu season fast approaching, means the situation for our hospitals could change quickly so we’re asking everyone to plan now.”

While the influenza vaccine won't combat COVID-19, it will help reduce the severity and spread of flu. Face masks are not recommended for the general public unless you are unwell and masks should be saved for people to use when they are sick.

The NSW's whole-of-government and NSW Health's Influenza Pandemic Plans are found here:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx>

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