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Today's issue of PD

Pharmacy Daily today features two pages of news.

NSW pill testing



THE Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) has welcomed the introduction of pill testing services in NSW this summer, with the state joining Victoria and the ACT in the provision of drug checking.

The peak industry body said the service, which will be available at events like music festivals, helps to reduce the harm of illicit substances.

“Drug checking or pill testing is not about telling consumers ‘this substance is safe’, but about allowing them to make an informed decision about the risks of the substances they have,” PSA National President Associate Professor Fei Sim said.

“Every summer we see young people lose their lives at events around the country because they didn’t know what was in the drugs they were taking.

“The evidence is overwhelming - pill testing and drug checking saves lives.”

The initiative will also allow health professionals to provide tailored support and information on illicit drug use and harm, Sim pointed out.

Free flu jabs for all Queenslanders in 2025

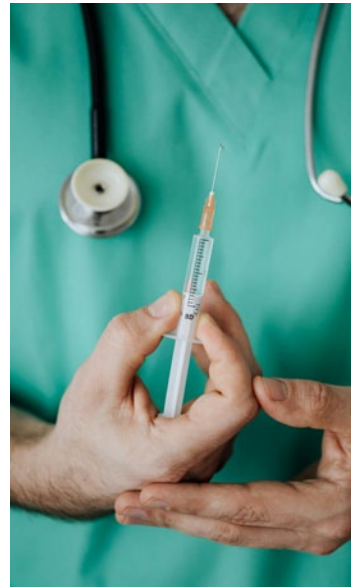
ALL QUEENSLANDERS over the age of six months will be able to get a free flu vaccination in 2025, from 01 Mar to 01 Sep.

Queensland’s Minister for Health and Ambulance Services, Tim Nicholls, said the program will help ease pressure on Queensland hospital emergency departments and the broader healthcare system.

“The highest influenza-related hospitalisation rates occur in older Queenslanders over 65 and young children under five,” Nicholls said.

“While Queenslanders in these age groups are already eligible for flu vaccination under the Commonwealth’s National Immunisation Program (NIP), extending free flu vaccination for all Queenslanders should improve uptake and support the broader health system through avoidable hospitalisations.”

Nicholls pointed out that flu vaccination uptake in Queensland last year was 29% of the total population - less than 2023 figure, and significantly down from the 2022 number (36% of the state’s total population), when free flu jabs



were first introduced.

“The decline in the numbers of Queenslanders getting the flu jab in 2023 and 2024 indicates vaccine fatigue and hesitancy may be impacting decisions more so than the cost,” he said.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia Queensland’s Branch President, Chris Owen, welcomed the

announcement, saying “free availability means Queenslanders will have every opportunity to access the vaccine before the worst of the flu season”.

“We recognise the government’s efforts in finding the resources to fund this initiative, especially as there are cohorts being funded by the Queensland Government that are not covered by the National Immunisation Program (NIP).”

“Higher vaccination rates mean fewer hospitalisations due to influenza; this means hospital beds can be freed up for more urgent needs,” he added.

The advanced notice also means Queensland families can plan ahead and visit their community pharmacy to receive the free vaccine before flu season arrives during the winter months, helping to reduce the spread of the virus.

“By making this announcement now, community pharmacists and other health care providers will have ample time to plan and secure the necessary vaccine stock to meet the anticipated demand,” Owen highlighted. *JM*

Measles cases on the rise in Victoria

VICTORIA has recorded an increase in measles cases over the holiday period as travellers return home from overseas, with growing outbreaks occurring internationally, including in Vietnam and Thailand.

A new case of measles was reported in the state after an infectious traveller arrived into Melbourne on 28 Dec on board a Vietnam Airlines flight.

This is in addition to a recent case in Queensland, who transited through Melbourne

Airport whilst infectious.

The Victorian Government is advising anyone who develops symptoms of measles to seek medical care, wear a mask, and isolate from others.

Australians planning overseas travel are also being reminded to make sure they have received appropriate travel vaccinations, including MMR vaccine.

Measles is a highly infectious viral illness that can spread from person-to-person and can lead to serious health complications.

Be early for APP

THERE is just one month left to secure earlybird registration for the Australian Pharmacy Professional Conference and Trade Exhibition (APP2025), which takes place on the Gold Coast from 20-22 Mar.

Pharmacy professionals are encouraged to secure their spot at the largest pharmacy conference in the southern hemisphere before 31 Jan to save up to \$120 on full registration fees.

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Dispensary Corner

AUSSIES are being urged to do away with New Year resolutions and instead focus on sustainable lifestyle changes, with 71% expected to ditch their 2025 health and fitness goals by the end of Jan.

According to nutrition and food tracking app MyFitnessPal, most Australians will be focused on improving their wellbeing and fitness in 2025, with more than three in five (62%) committed to losing weight.

However, more than four in 10 (43%) will break their resolutions just one week into the new year.

In fact, the majority (61%) of Australians repeat the same New Year's resolution each year, which shows that many of us are perhaps not being realistic when it comes to goal-setting.

"While it's great that Australians are starting the New Year with the healthy intention in mind, research shows that most New Year's resolutions do not stick, and in fact are often repeated year after year," PhD, habit researcher, and dietitian, Dr. Gina Cleo said.

"This tells us that we need to approach health goals with a more balanced mindset.

"The ultimate goal should be making sustainable lifestyle changes that last in the long-term," she said.

Aussies who want to lose weight, exercise more, or eat healthier should focus on achievable goals and making progress over time, Dr Cleo said, while accounting for the unpredictability of everyday life.

Johnson & Johnson sued



PHARMACEUTICAL giant Johnson & Johnson is facing a class action for allegedly selling "ineffective" cold and flu medicine to Australians (**PD** breaking news 20 Dec 2024).

Brisbane law firm JGA Saddler filed proceedings in the Federal Court last month over oral cold and flu products sold by the company under the Codral, Sudafed and Benadryl brands.

The medicines all contain the drug phenylephrine, which has been marketed and sold as a decongestant for many years, however there is growing evidence to suggest it doesn't work when taken orally, prompting a move in the US to ban the drug.

JGA Saddler alleges that Johnson & Johnson has been knowingly marketing and selling ineffective medicines, putting profits over Australians.

"Customers should be able to confidently buy medicines that work as advertised and when they don't, the company involved should be held accountable," JGA Saddler Director Rebecca Jancauskas said.

"Johnson & Johnson has manufactured and marketed a medication that decades of evidence have shown doesn't work as claimed, relying on outdated,

fallible studies to sell the Australian public products that don't do what they claim on the packet.

"Australians have trusted these products to work as advertised and wouldn't have bought them if they realised they were ineffective at treating congestion," she added.

Brisbane ear, nose, and throat specialist Dr Jo-Lyn McKenzie has also slammed the pharmaceutical company's marketing of phenylephrine as an oral decongestant, emphasising that it is "unconscionable and deeply unethical for corporations to sell healthcare products while knowing they don't work".

"This practice erodes trust in a space that depends on consumer confidence," she stated, adding the situation serves as a reminder for Australians consumers to be cautious and informed.

"Rather than relying on direct-to-consumer advertising, take the time to have meaningful conversations with health professionals who can provide evidence-based recommendations."

JGA Saddler is urging all Australians who have purchased any of the 20 Johnson & Johnson products included in the lawsuit since 2005 to register for the class action - find out more **HERE**. *JM*

TGA ticks AirPods

THE latest Apple AirPods have been approved for use as hearing aids in Australia, after getting the green light from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA).

The AirPods Pro 2 version were classified by the TGA as a medical device last month, however the technology requires a software update before Australian consumers can use the auditory features.

Apple told Channel Nine that the TGA's approval was an "important first step toward making these features available in Australia" and that it is "working...to make these experiences available as soon as possible".

Apple's iPhone has software built in that when paired with the AirPods Pro 2 can conduct a clinical grade hearing test; the iPhone can then provide a report and enable the hearing aid feature if needed.

The tech is already being used for hearing impairment treatment in select countries, including New Zealand.

"The feature is intended to amplify sound for individuals 18 years of age or older with perceived mild to moderate hearing impairment," according to the TGA.

"[It] is an over-the-counter air-conduction hearing assessment intended to profile hearing ability and to produce an audiogram without the assistance of a healthcare professional".

Priced at around \$400, the Apple AirPods Pro 2 offer Australian consumers an affordable way to get the benefits of hearing aids.