




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Influenza, Vaccination

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women) (10.07 am): Our tireless frontline health staff work day in, day out to provide care for us in our times of need. They are doing their bit to help us and that is why we should all do our bit to help them. The No. 1 thing that every Queenslanders can do right now to help our healthcare heroes is to go out and get vaccinated. As the Premier has said, since announcing that we would make flu vaccines free more than 131,000 Queenslanders have rolled up their sleeves to get vaccinated. That is a great result and we have seen flu cases across every age group decline in recent weeks, but there is more to do.

Since COVID, we have seen vaccination rates decrease across the country. Last month it was reported that only 32 per cent of Australians received their flu shot this year and in some states the drop in vaccine uptake has been over 20 per cent. Alarmingly, this trend is tied to a post-pandemic 7½ per cent drop in trust for childhood vaccinations in this country. Vaccinations save lives and I want Queensland to lead the nation when it comes to vaccinations. We cannot allow vaccine fatigue, conspiracy theories or cost-of-living pressures to undermine vaccination rates, whether it is for the flu, COVID or other lifesaving vaccines, and risk the public health of our communities. That is why free vaccines and comprehensive information and communication campaigns matter.

Clearly, our decision to make flu vaccines free is making a difference. It is time the rest of the country followed our lead. We will continue to advocate for a nationally consistent approach across states and territories, including free flu vaccines for every Australian through the National Immunisation Program and greater advertising and awareness campaigns. We will also advocate for the federal government to follow Queensland's lead in making meningococcal B vaccine free for children. I know how devastating meningococcal B is because I have met with those affected by it—people like Jodie and Blair Fidler, who tragically lost their daughter, Bella, last year and Phoebe O'Connell, who survived and now with her mum, Katy, has become a passionate advocate for free meningococcal B vaccines. After hearing these stories firsthand, I announced earlier this month that we will offer meningococcal B vaccines to all infants and children under the age of two and adolescents aged 15 to 19 years. I want to thank Jodie, Blair, Phoebe, Katy and every other advocate who has helped make this possible. Their advocacy will make Queenslanders safer.