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MAJORITY OF AUSTRALIANS RISK COLLEAGUES' HEALTH TO MEET WORK DEADLINES

With the 2012 flu vaccination available from today, an Influenza Specialist Group (ISG) survey has revealed an alarming 90 per cent of Australians have risked the health of their colleagues by going to work sick because they don't want to let them down or miss deadlines.

The national survey examined attitudes towards presenteeism - the phenomenon where employees turn up to work when sick - and looked at Australians' flu etiquette.

Results revealed that while Australians are becoming increasingly frustrated and annoyed when people go about their day to day activities while sick, they are reluctant to practice flu etiquette themselves with 70 per cent confessing to have participated in social activities despite having flu symptoms.

ISG Chairman Dr Alan Hampson said the fact so many Australians are going to work sick is even more of a reason to get vaccinated now as flu can hit in Autumn.

"People need to get vaccinated now - it could save their lives and will ensure they are protected when others bring the infection into their workplaces or social environment," he said.

University of Sydney immunisation expert, Professor Robert Booy said presenteeism was a major concern, especially for people who are at high risk.

"The influenza virus is more likely to have severe consequences for pregnant women, those aged over 65, people with underlying medical conditions and Indigenous Australians," he said.

People are underestimating just how dangerous the flu can be with almost 20 per cent of those Australians going to work sick doing so because they don't think flu symptoms are a serious enough reason to stay home – a mindset which is costing our economy more than \$34 billion a year¹ and potentially risking lives. A growing number of Australian employers are responding by offering their employees free on-site vaccination.

“People need to take the flu much more seriously as it is a potentially fatal disease that is estimated to cause more deaths than accidents on roads,”² said Dr Hampson.

The survey also found while more than 80 per cent of Australians would move away from a person displaying flu symptoms and 36 per cent feel concerned about their health when sick people go about their day to day activities, only ten percent would tell a person who has the flu that they should minimise contact with others.

And when it comes to flu etiquette and hygiene, Australia isn't faring too well compared with other countries.

Coming in sixth in the Global Hygiene Council's world personal hygiene rankings, Australians could be doing more to improve their hygiene and prevent the flu spreading as one third aren't bothering to disinfect their hands or wash them more while sick.

We're also much more likely to go to work and continue our day to day activities while sick (90%) compared with our American counterparts (64%).³

According to Dr Hampson and Professor Booy, the message this flu season is simple.

Be “flusmart” by getting vaccinated against flu, it could save you from one or two weeks spent laid up in bed, having to spend money on medications and, more importantly, it can save lives.

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1 Medibank Private Survey, July 2011 – Sick at work, the cost of presenteeism to your business and the economy

2 In Australia influenza and its complications is estimated to cause between 1,500 and 3,500 deaths and more than 18,000 hospitalisations per year. (Newall AT, Wood JG, MacIntyre CR. Influenza-related hospitalisation and death in Australians aged 50 years and older Vaccine 2008;051

Fatalities each year on Australian and Victorian roads. Information sourced from Australian Transport Safety Bureau and Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics and Transport Accident Commission: in 2010 1368 died on Australian roads.

3 National Foundation for Infectious Diseases and Emily Post Institute 2012 survey

For more information, or to set up an interview with Dr Hampson, Professor Booy or an ISG director in your state, please contact:

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