

## 'Flu vaccinations lead to hospital cost savings, study shows

Having a 'flu vaccination can lead to a 41% reduction in hospital costs per member, far fewer complications and a shorter hospital stay.

A study by TopMed medical scheme has found that the number of admissions to hospital for patients with influenza or its most common complication, pneumonia, has increased by a staggering 240% since 2007, with a 193% increase from 2008. The length of stay is significantly shorter for members who received the 'flu vaccination versus members who did not.

The average cost for admissions for influenza/pneumonia in 2009 is 19% less than that of 2008 and the average

hospital cost for members who received the flu vaccine is 41% less than those who did not receive the 'flu vaccine. This figure was calculated based on the potential costs that would have been incurred if their average hospital cost was equal to that of members suffering from the same condition who did not have the vaccine.

TopMed Executive Principal Officer Len Deacon said that pneumonia is the most common complication of influenza, which occurs most frequently in certain groups of patients with underlying chronic illnesses who are classified as 'high risk' for infection.

High risk groups include patients with illnesses that involve the cardiovascular or pulmonary systems; patients with asthma; diabetes mellitus; renal disease; haemoglobinopathy; or immunosuppression; residents of nursing homes or chronic care facilities, and otherwise healthy individuals over 50.

The most effective way to prevent influenza is by getting the 'flu vaccination as well as using simple infection control measures such as hand washing. Antiviral medicines can also help prevent infection if one is exposed to the 'flu.

**Susann Caminada, TopMed Medical Scheme, T+27 (0)21 680 7604**