



WELCOME TO THE SECOND LA HEALTH NEWSLETTER FOR 2023

Hello and welcome to the second edition of our newsletter for 2023. We hope this newsletter finds you in good health and high spirits as we bring you the latest health news and tips to keep you healthy and thriving during the winter season.

In this edition, we cover a range of topics that are essential for your well-being, including the importance of blood pressure tests, protecting yourself against RSV and flu, and the benefits of getting a flu vaccine. We also share some useful tips to help you stay active during the colder months and provide an essential winter self-care to-do list.

Additionally, we are excited to announce that LA Health has reached a significant milestone, with 100,000 principal members! This is a testament to our commitment to providing top-quality health services to our community.

We'd also like to invite you to join our Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 29 June 2023. We will share updates on the Scheme's performance during 2022.

We have updated some amounts under "Key Financial & Service Metrics" in the Notice previously sent. Please see the updated information on page 12 in the [AGM Notice](#).

Event details

Time: 10:00

Venue: Protea Hotel, Jip de Jager Drive, Tygervalley

We hope you enjoy this issue and find the information useful. Remember to prioritise your health and stay safe during the winter season.

Regards

AM de Koker

Principal Officer

LA Health





A SIMPLE BLOOD PRESSURE TEST COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE



High blood pressure, or hypertension, is known as a 'silent killer' because there usually aren't visible symptoms to warn that a person's blood pressure is high. The good news is that hypertension is relatively easy to control once diagnosed, which is why it's important to go for a simple screening test at least once a year.

"According to the [Southern African Hypertension Society](#), high blood pressure, medically known as hypertension, is the major risk factor for heart diseases, strokes, kidney disease and even eye diseases," says Dr Noluthando Nematswerani, Head of the Centre for Clinical Excellence at Discovery Health. "When blood pressure goes above a certain limit, we call it high blood pressure."

What is high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is when the force of circulating blood against your artery walls is continually high – high enough to eventually cause health problems, such as heart disease.

The [Mayo Clinic](#) explains that high blood pressure is also determined by the amount of blood your heart pumps: "The more blood your heart pumps and the narrower your arteries, the higher your blood pressure."

Why hypertension is silent – and dangerous

The [Heart and Stroke Foundation of South Africa](#) found that more than a third of adults in South Africa live with high blood pressure. Hypertension is responsible for half of all strokes and 40% of heart attacks.

Hypertension is also a major cause of premature death across the world, says the [World Health Organization](#). "About 4 in 10

adults older than 25 have hypertension. This means that nearly one billion people have hypertension. Unfortunately, around 50% of these people are unaware of their condition," says Dr Nematswerani.

Understanding the numbers

Blood pressure can be checked quickly and easily by a nurse at a pharmacy or clinic, or by your GP. A device called a sphygmomanometer will be used to do this – and it's much easier to use than it is to pronounce! It's simply a cuff that's placed around the upper arm. The cuff gets tighter as it's inflated to give the blood pressure reading.

Blood pressure is measured in millimetres of mercury (mm Hg). The measurement is recorded as two numbers, one 'over' another – for example 140/90 mm Hg. The top number refers to systolic pressure, which is the pressure in your arteries when your heart contracts. The bottom number refers to diastolic pressure, which is the pressure when your heart is resting between beats (when pressure is at its lowest). So, a measurement of 140/90 mm Hg is read as systolic over diastolic pressure.

"A normal blood pressure reading is below 120/80 mm Hg," explains Dr Nematswerani. "Hypertension is usually defined as when either number (or both numbers) are equal to or above 140/90 mm Hg, when measured on two different days. You will need emergency medical care if your blood pressure measurement is 180/120 mm Hg or higher."

Hypertension is easy to manage if picked up early enough

“If hypertension is picked up early enough, it is relatively easy to manage,” says Dr Nematswerani. “This is why we encourage all our members to go for preventive screenings at least once a year, where blood pressure readings and other important health checks will be done.”

Symptoms and causes of hypertension

Most people with hypertension don't have any symptoms. Those who do have symptoms may experience headaches, shortness of breath, dizziness, chest pain, heart palpitations and nose bleeds.

Primary hypertension (also called essential hypertension) is when no cause for the high blood pressure can be found. Primary hypertension is thought to run in families and is affected by our lifestyle choices (for example, what we eat and how much exercise we get). Secondary hypertension is caused by an underlying condition such as kidney disease, vascular disease or a tumour.

According to the Mayo Clinic, the biggest risk factors for hypertension are:

- **Age**

The risk of high blood pressure increases as you age. Until about age 64, high blood pressure is more common in men. In women, the risk increases significantly after age 65.

- **Race**

High blood pressure is particularly common among people of African heritage, often developing at an earlier age than it does in Caucasian people. Serious complications, such as stroke, heart attack and kidney failure, also are more common in people of African heritage.

- **Being overweight or obese**

The more you weigh, the more blood you need to supply oxygen and nutrients to your tissues. As the volume of blood circulated through your blood vessels increases, so does the pressure on your artery walls.

- **Family history**

High blood pressure tends to run in families, with a genetic predisposition putting certain people at higher risk.

- **Physical inactivity**

People who are inactive tend to have higher heart rates. The higher your heart rate, the harder your heart must work with each contraction, which means there's more force on your arteries. Lack of physical activity also increases the risk of being overweight.

- **High stress levels**

High levels of stress can lead to a temporary increase in blood pressure. If you try to relax by eating more, using tobacco or drinking alcohol, you may increase your risk factors for high blood pressure.

- **Smoking**

Not only does smoking or chewing tobacco immediately raise your blood pressure temporarily, but the chemicals in tobacco can damage the lining of your artery walls. This can cause your arteries to narrow and increase your risk of heart disease. Second-hand smoke can also increase your risk of heart disease.

- **Excessive alcohol intake**

Over time, heavy drinking can damage your heart. Having more than one drink a day for women and more than two drinks a day for men may affect your blood pressure.

- **Making unhealthy food choices**

This includes eating too much salt, as too much sodium in your diet can cause your body to retain fluid, which increases blood pressure.

- **Certain chronic conditions**

Conditions such as kidney disease, diabetes and sleep apnoea may increase your risk of high blood pressure.

“Don't wait for symptoms to appear. High blood pressure becomes more likely with older age, but anyone, no matter their age, gender, fitness level or lifestyle, can develop high blood pressure,” says Dr Nematswerani.

A healthy lifestyle for healthy blood pressure

Making lifestyle changes can help you to control and prevent high blood pressure. Dr Nematswerani suggests living by the following principles:

- Eat healthy foods
- Decrease the salt in your diet
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Increase your physical activity
- Don't smoke
- Manage your stress
- Limit your alcohol intake
- Know your blood pressure numbers





PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR LOVED ONES AGAINST **RSV INFECTION AND FLU**

Recently another respiratory virus made headlines internationally: respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). This virus surged jointly with flu and COVID-19 in the United States of America (USA) during their winter months.

RSV season starts in February in South Africa as this virus is usually most active during autumn and early winter. It is therefore important to be aware of what to look out for and what actions to take to prevent the spread of the RSV infection and to protect yourself and your loved ones from getting infected.

RSV causes infection of the respiratory tract including the lungs

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a respiratory virus that usually causes mild, cold-like symptoms. Most people recover in a week or two, but RSV can also cause serious illness. Almost all children have had an RSV infection by the time they turn two.

RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis (inflammation of the small airways in the lung) and pneumonia (infection of the lungs) in young children.

Persons who are most affected by RSV

RSV can cause severe infection in some people, including:

- Infants (babies of 12 months and younger), especially premature infants.
- Older adults
- People with heart and lung disease
- People with weakened immune systems (immunocompromised)
- RSV can also worsen some of the chronic lung and heart conditions such as asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and heart failure.

The signs and symptoms of RSV

RSV may not be severe when it first starts. However, it can become more severe a few days into the illness.

Early symptoms of RSV may include:

- Runny nose
- Decrease in appetite
- Cough, which may progress to wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Sneezing
- Fever

In infants less than six months old, the only symptoms of RSV infection may be:

- Irritability
- Decreased activity
- Decreased appetite
- Apnoea (pauses in breathing of more than 10 seconds)

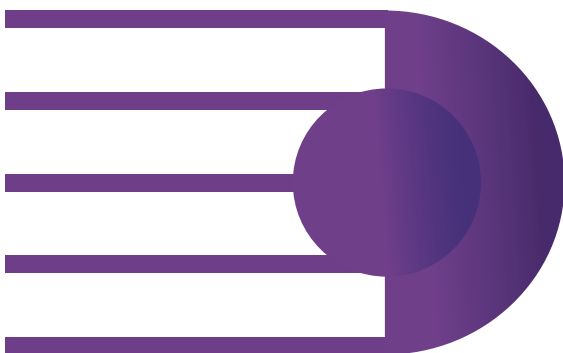
How to prevent RSV infection and the flu

Vaccines and vaccinations to prevent and lessen severity of infections

There is currently no approved vaccine for RSV. LA Health Medical Scheme does, however, fund for palivizumab (Synagis) for certain infants who are at high risk for severe disease from RSV.

Luckily, there are vaccines for influenza (flu) shots. The flu vaccine is updated yearly to protect us against the new main strains of influenza viruses that research shows will be most common during the upcoming season. It's a good idea to get the flu shot every year. LA Health pays for a flu shot from your Screening and Prevention benefit if you are at high risk for severe disease. You can learn more about your cover from the Screening and Prevention Benefit [here](#).

Also make sure that you are up to date with your COVID-19 vaccines and boosters to protect yourself from severe COVID-19 infection.



Measures to prevent spreading of respiratory viruses

If you have contact with infants, young children and other people who are at risk of severe disease, do your best to keep them healthy. RSV and influenza are respiratory viruses, just like COVID-19, so we can do the same things to prevent spreading of these viruses. Here is a reminder:

- **Wash your hands often** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- **Keep your hands off your face.** Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- **Avoid close contact with sick people,** like kissing and sharing cups or eating utensils.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue or your upper shirt sleeve when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash afterwards.
- **Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects** that people frequently touch, such as toys, doorknobs and mobile devices.
- **Stay home when you are sick.** This will help protect others from catching your illness.
- **Vaccinate:** Get vaccinated against diseases such as COVID-19 and influenza.

How to treat RSV infection

There is currently no cure or treatment for RSV other than supportive treatment and symptom control. For more serious cases, people might need hospitalisation with supporting oxygen, hydration and medicine to control symptoms.



GETTING A FLU VACCINATION IN 2023 IS A VERY GOOD IDEA. HERE'S WHY.

As we head into the 2023 flu season, getting a flu shot is important to protect ourselves and our loved ones from flu-related infections and complications. This is true even for the fittest and healthiest among us.

Let's kick off with 5 good reasons to get your flu vaccination this year.

Flu (influenza) is caused by a virus which **spreads through respiratory droplets** released by the body when we breathe out (when we, for example, talk, cough or sneeze). Depending on an individual's health status or underlying risk profile, some people can get very sick from the flu virus.

1. The flu vaccine will help to lower your risk of becoming sick with flu.
2. Although the flu vaccine doesn't offer complete protection against getting the flu, it does lower your chances of getting the infection. And, if you do get flu, you'll recover faster. This means you're not infectious for as long, which helps limit the spread of infection to others.
3. If you're at a high risk of developing a serious influenza illness – like bronchitis and pneumonia – this vaccine is a must.
4. If you live with a person who is at risk, your vaccine is a must.
5. It is still the most effective way to protect you against flu infection and its complications.

“The same preventive measures that protect us from exposure to COVID-19 – like washing hands, wearing masks, practicing social distancing, ensuring spaces are well ventilated and isolating when we are sick – also protect us from influenza infection,” says Dr Noluthando Nematswerani, Head of the Centre for Clinical Excellence at Discovery Health.

And, just as COVID-19 vaccination adds a protective layer to our overall armour against the disease, flu vaccines do the same in protecting against influenza.

Did you know that both flu and COVID-19 can cause serious illness?

“Most people who get flu have mild illness with symptoms like fever, a dry cough, headaches, muscle and joint pains, a sore throat and runny nose, and generally feeling unwell. For some people, getting the flu can result in complications like bronchitis or pneumonia, which may result in them going to hospital,” she explains.

- According to the [World Health Organization](#), 290 000 to 650 000 people die of flu-related causes every year worldwide.
- In South Africa, influenza kills 6 000 to 11 000 people every year according to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).
- Read the National Institute for Communicable Diseases' (NICD's) [Influenza fact sheet](#) for more information.





When should I get my flu shot?

To get the full benefits of the flu vaccine, you should get vaccinated before the start of the flu season which on average is the first week of June. Ideally, as soon as the 2023 flu vaccine becomes available, which is usually in March or early April, you should get vaccinated. However, it will still protect you against severe flu and its complications if you have it at any other point during the flu season.

“It’s good to get vaccinated early every year to make sure you’re protected against the latest strains of the flu virus,” adds Dr Nematswerani.

Did you know that you don’t have to wait between having your COVID-19 vaccination and flu vaccination?

You can now get many other vaccines at the same time you get your COVID-19 vaccine.

If you’ve had COVID-19, it’s also safe to have the flu vaccine. It will still be effective at helping to lower your risk of being infected with the flu.

We should all get a flu vaccine. But who needs it most?

Flu vaccines are highly recommended for people most at risk of serious flu, including:

1. Children aged six months to five years.
2. People aged 65 or over.
3. People who have HIV.
4. People who are pregnant or postpartum (usually, the first six weeks after childbirth) – the flu vaccine is safe to have while breastfeeding.
5. People living in care facilities (old-age homes, or chronic care and rehabilitation institutions).
6. People who have a chronic health condition (like asthma, heart or kidney disease, diabetes and so on).
7. People who have a weakened immune system.

How do my scheme benefits cover my flu shot?

LA Health Medical Scheme pays for one seasonal flu vaccine a year for members who are at a high risk of getting severe flu illness:

- If you are considered a high risk, the Screening and Prevention Benefit will cover your flu shot every year.
- If you are not considered to be a high risk, your flu shot is covered from your available day-to-day benefits or the Screening and Prevention Benefit, if applicable.

If your healthcare provider charges for giving you the vaccine, we will pay for these costs from your available day-to-day benefits.

Where can you get your flu vaccine?

Book a visit at your healthcare provider or nearest pharmacy for your shot. Call them before you go to make sure they have the flu vaccine in stock.



TOP 10 TIPS TO STAY ACTIVE THIS WINTER

Humans are made to move. This explains why we feel so triumphant after a run, or any other exercise for that matter. We have more energy, we may lose some unwanted weight, and even our mood improves. In addition, it lowers our risk of getting a serious chronic illness like heart disease, diabetes and even some cancers.

According to Prof Martin Schwellnus, Director of the Institute for Sport, Exercise Medicine and Lifestyle Research at the University of Pretoria, humans are genetically programmed to be physically active every day. "If we don't stay active, we quickly feel the detrimental effects on our overall health and physiology. The benefits of physical activity in the scientific and medical literature are at this point, absolutely undisputed as a vital component of health," he says.

But winter has a way of messing with our plans to stick to an exercise routine, especially if it involves exercising outside. The benefits far outweigh the comfort of home, however: Regular exercise can help boost our immune system, which helps to keep colds and flu away. Also, as we tend to eat more in winter, staying active can help us maintain our weight.

Our top 8 tips to stay active and healthy during winter

1. **Plan your exercise** session ahead and put it in your calendar to make sure you allocate time for it. Getting bored? Change up your schedule if you can – go to work earlier and leave earlier to get some sunlight if you prefer exercising outdoors.
2. Set up a **support group** with friends or family where you can keep each other accountable.
3. **Get the family involved** and make the most of the change of season. Winter offers a good opportunity to explore hiking trails in your area as it won't be too hot to be outside. You could also take the dog for a walk or run while the kids ride their bikes.
4. **Enter a fun race** that you can do with your friends and remind each other that you are training towards a goal. It not only gets your heart pumping, but also allows you to socialise with other runners.
5. When time is a limiting factor, **split your workouts** into two to three sessions throughout the day, each of around 10 to 15 minutes at a higher intensity level.
6. Try to **stick to your exercise routine**, even when you really don't feel like it. Make sure you have your exercise clothes in your car or close by and tell yourself that you will do at least 10 minutes. You will find that after 10 minutes the laziness has gone, and you will feel more energised to do a full workout. If after 10 minutes you still feel flat or tired, **pick a less strenuous workout** like a brisk walk or any other workout at a light to moderate intensity.
7. The recommended amount of exercise is a minimum of 150 minutes a week of light to moderate intensity exercise, or 90 minutes a week at a vigorous intensity. An easy way to reach such a goal is to **try being more active during the day** by taking the stairs, parking further away, walking further or longer when shopping, and playing active games with your kids.
8. Get a fitness device to monitor the progress you are making. They say that summer bodies are made in winter. This may be true, but we like to say that a healthy body is made every day – come rain or shine.



YOUR ESSENTIAL WINTER SELF-CARE TO-DO LIST

Self-care means taking care of your body and mind proactively. This year, to be better prepared for the chilly season, here's a list of ways to make this winter healthier.

1. Pay attention to your mental wellbeing

Exercise and healthy eating habits are important to your physical wellbeing and play a big role in your mental wellbeing. We need to rest, relax and recharge regularly to build resilience and stay energised for tomorrow.

Nurturing your mental wellbeing helps boost your mood and self-esteem and clear your mind:

- Practice mindfulness: Take time to pause, reflect and be present in the moment.
- Make sure you get enough quality sleep.
- Spend time reconnecting with nature.
- Do something you love, like listening to music, watching your favourite shows, or cooking.
- Laugh! Laughter is the best medicine and a good way to relieve stress.

2. Get your flu shot

We can still be proactive about our health while we prepare for the winter months. It's important to get a vaccination and build resistance against the flu.

3. Move more

Exercise contributes to good holistic health and therefore to a healthy immune system in the same way a healthy, balanced diet does. Just 30 minutes of moderate exercise, like walking or running, improves your physical health, helps you sleep better, reduces stress and anxiety, and boosts your mood. It also helps you build resistance against illness, including colds and flu.

4. Eat healthily

The food you eat can also affect your wellbeing. "What you eat can have a very real effect on your day-to-day functioning," says dietitian Terry Harris. "Following a healthy, balanced diet can lower stress and anxiety, boost brain function, and nourish your body and mind. It also increases your energy and productivity. So, the next time you crave something sweet, reach for fruit instead of a processed snack."

5. Screen for health risks – safely

Self-care means managing any existing health conditions. Preventative screening checks are designed to help you identify and manage health risks, and give you an indication of where to focus to improve your health and wellness.



LA HEALTH REACHES MILESTONE WITH OVER 100 000 PRINCIPAL MEMBERS

LA Health Medical Scheme recently achieved a significant milestone by surpassing the 100 000 principal member mark. The scheme welcomed its 100 000th member from the Eastern Cape, who joined in March, marking a momentous occasion for LA Health. This achievement is a testament to the trust and confidence that members place in LA Health's commitment to providing quality healthcare coverage. It also reflects the scheme's dedication to providing exceptional healthcare coverage and service to its members. LA Health remains committed to its mission of making quality healthcare accessible and affordable to all its members and looks forward to continuing its growth and success in the future.



Principal Officer André de Koker received a special commemoration, celebrating the 100k member milestone from Stephen Johnston, Head of Inhouse at Discovery Health, our administrator.