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Influenza

The BEACH program (Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health) gathers data on many aspects of the GP-patient encounter including medications prescribed or supplied. We examined encounters recorded between April 2003 and June 2008 to trace the relationship between uptake of influenza vaccine in BEACH and the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing data on laboratory confirmed influenza.

■ Influenza, or the 'flu', is a highly infectious respiratory viral disease, most common during the winter months. BEACH data confirm the peak period for influenza vaccination in general practice is April to June. In 2007, the influenza vaccination rate in BEACH was the lowest in recent years (Figure 1). In mid 2007 the most severe influenza season since national reporting began in 2001 occurred, and the number of laboratory confirmed notifications for influenza was far higher than the 5 year mean.¹ At the same time, there was an increase in influenza-like illness (ILI) managed by general practitioners compared with the same period in 2006.² An Australia wide surveillance system run by the New South Wales government also found that unvaccinated people had much higher rates of illness than vaccinated people.³

Figure 1 shows the prescription and supply rates of influenza vaccine at BEACH encounters for the April to June quarters. Figure 2 shows data on laboratory confirmed cases of influenza notified to the Department of Health and Ageing's National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS). The graph gives details of annual notification rates, which follow each vaccination period.

During the April to June quarters of the first 4 years, influenza vaccination rates were fairly steady at 9.1–8.4 per 100 encounters. However, in 2007 the influenza vaccination rate decreased marginally to 6.8 per 100 encounters and a severe influenza season followed. Although this decrease was just marginally significant statistically, it appears to have had more than a marginal effect.

Up until early August 2008, cases of laboratory confirmed influenza are at half the 2007 levels.⁴ The vaccination rate recorded

in BEACH April to June 2008 rose significantly compared with the 2007 rate, and has again reached the 2003 level of 9.1 per 100 encounters.

Figure 1. April to June influenza vaccination rates – BEACH

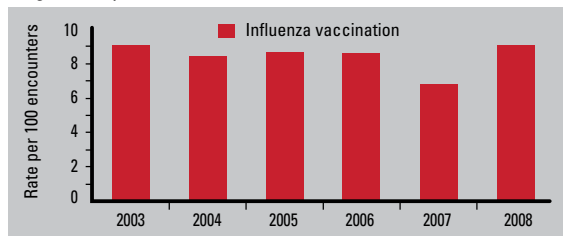
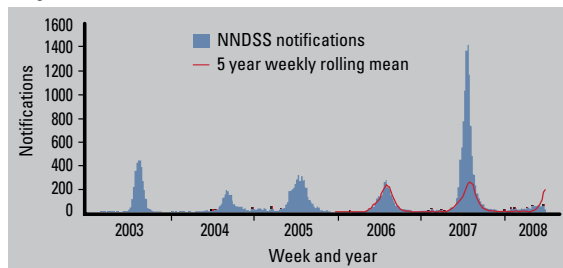


Figure 2. Notifications to NNDSS of confirmed influenza



Conflict of interest: none declared.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the GP participants in the BEACH program and all members of the BEACH team. Financial contributors to BEACH between 2003 and 2008: Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; National Prescribing Service; AstraZeneca Pty Ltd (Australia); Janssen-Cilag Pty Ltd; Merck, Sharp and Dohme (Australia) Pty Ltd; Pfizer Australia; Abbott Australasia; Sanofi-Aventis Australia Pty Ltd; Roche Products Pty Ltd.

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