

Flu Wave Hits Southeast Asia, Highlighting Gaps in Protection for the Elderly

Category: Business

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Many countries in Asia are reporting a sharp rise in flu cases. The intensified rainy season is fueling transmission and creating ideal conditions for rapid spread. In a single week, Thailand recorded more than 30,000 new cases.¹ Meanwhile, Japan declared a nationwide flu epidemic on 3 October after confirming more than 6,000 patients that week.²



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The Philippines has also surpassed epidemic thresholds, with a 10% increase in private hospital admissions.³ In response, all public schools in Metro Manila suspended face-to-face classes on 13-14 October.⁴ Similar upward trends have also appeared in Taiwan and Singapore, reflecting a broader regional surge.^{5,6}

Health experts warn that older adults are most at risk of severe flu complications including pneumonia and heart attacks, hospitalization, and even death. This concern is growing as Southeast Asia's population ages rapidly. The World Health Organization (WHO) projects that the proportion of people aged over 60 in the region will nearly double, from 12.2% in 2024 to 22.9% by 2050.⁷ Despite the rising need for protection, influenza vaccination coverage among the elderly remains low, leaving millions at higher risk of severe illness each flu season.

Recognizing this gap, Sanofi, in collaboration with the Vietnam National Institute for Control of Vaccines and Biologicals (NICVB) and the Malaysian Society of Infection

Control and Infectious Diseases (MyICID), organized a regional webinar titled *“Shielding Golden Years: The Power of Flu Vaccines for Older Adults.”* The event gathered leading experts and engaged nearly 700 healthcare professionals across Southeast Asia.

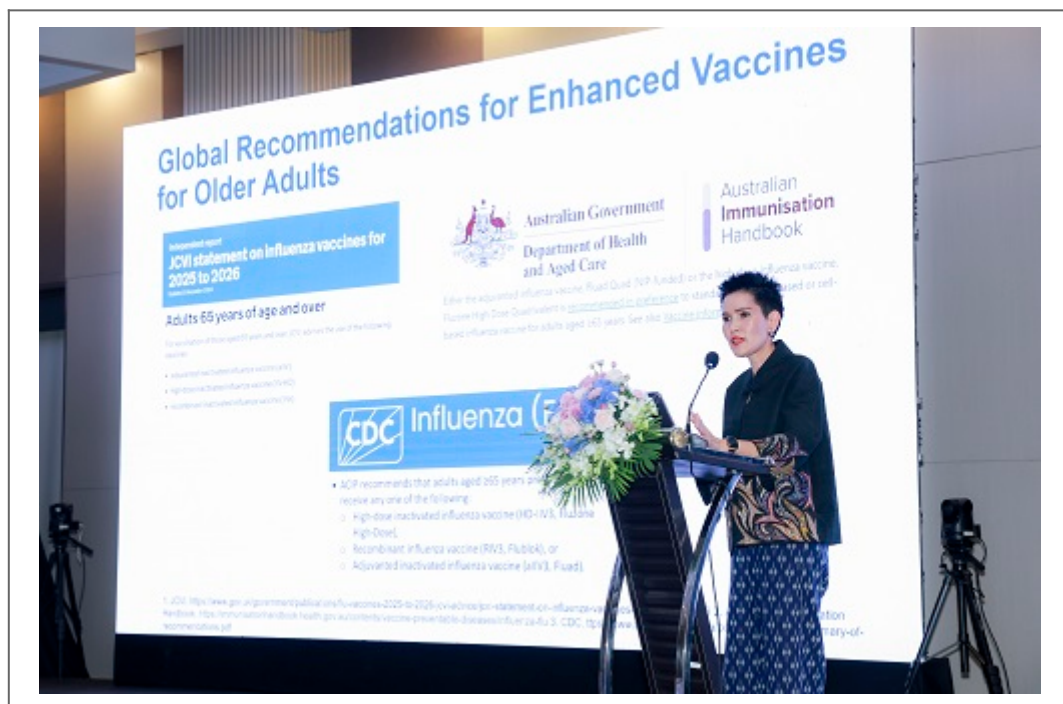
Dr. Steven C.L. Lim, MD, MRCP, President of the MyICID, emphasized that older adults are the most vulnerable to severe outcomes from influenza due to aging immune response, frailty, and comorbidities. *“The flu virus infection exacerbates underlying chronic medical conditions, leading to an increased risk for hospitalization and death. Influenza vaccination should be part of standard care for the elderly, especially those with chronic diseases,”* he said.

Assoc. Prof. Pham Quang Thai, MD, MPhil, PhD, Head of the Expanded Immunization Office for the Northern Region of Vietnam, highlighted that *“among older adults in Vietnam, annual influenza hospitalizations are 154% higher, and mortality rates 700% higher than those in the 50 to 64 age group. However, vaccination coverage among adults aged 65 and above remains low at just 5.55%, far below the WHO target of 75%.8”*



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"Flu vaccines offer meaningful protection against severe outcomes such as hospitalization and complications in this vulnerable population," said Prof. Sasisopin Kiertiburanakul, MD, MHS, Vice President of the Infectious Disease Association of Thailand (IDAT). *"The priority is ensuring that older adults choose the right vaccines available to prevent serious flu-related outcomes."* She called for stronger awareness and regional collaboration to improve vaccine access and better protect Southeast Asia's aging population.



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Dr. Ruby Dizon, Head of Medical for Sanofi Vaccines Southeast Asia & India, emphasized: *"As the global leader in advanced influenza prevention solutions, Sanofi's commitment is to deliver Protection Beyond Flu. We ensure people have access to*

vaccines with proven better protection against influenza infection and its severe complications. By raising the bar in influenza prevention, we are striving to set new standards in public health as we move closer to our vision."

¹ Thailand Sees Spike in Flu and RSV Cases as Rainy Season Hits

² As the Flu Surges in Asia, Could Getting Sick Year-Round Be the New Normal? | TIME

³ Health group to LGUs: Secure flu vaccines for seniors | Philippine News Agency

⁴ Flu-like illness: Metro Manila onsite classes suspended | Philstar.com

⁵ Flu visits up 13.5% to over 150,000 last week: CDC – Focus Taiwan

⁶ Some Singapore clinics see spike in flu cases amid weather changes, weak precautionary practices – CNA

⁷ www.who.int/southeastasia/health-topics/ageing

⁸ www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/understanding-drivers-of-influenza-vaccine-uptake

