Media Release

The Hon Jill Hennessy MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services

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NEW THUNDERSTORM ASTHMA FORECASTING SYSTEM

A new world-leading thunderstorm asthma monitoring, prediction and alert system is now up and running, giving Victorians an early warning of possible epidemic thunderstorm asthma events this grass pollen season.

Marking the start of the grass pollen season, Minister for Health Jill Hennessy today launched the Andrews Labor Government's new epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecasting system to better predict and respond to large-scale emergencies such as thunderstorm asthma.

People with asthma or hay fever are particularly at risk of thunderstorm asthma, and for many it can be sudden, serious and life threatening.

The Labor Government invested $15 million into Victoria's thunderstorm asthma response, and partnered with the Bureau of Meteorology, the University of Melbourne, Deakin University and other research organisations to develop the state-of-the-art epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecasting system – one of the first in the world.

Not every thunderstorm causes thunderstorm asthma. The new forecasting system will forecast the risk of epidemic thunderstorm asthma which is triggered by high grass pollen levels and a certain type of thunderstorm.

The forecasting system considers grass pollen forecasts, weather observations and data including wind changes, temperature, rainfall and grass coverage. It will then identify the risk of epidemic thunderstorm asthma using a traffic light scale of: green for low, orange for moderate, and red for high – and trigger warnings if required.

To support the system, the Government expanded pollen data collection sites with new pollen traps in Hamilton, Creswick, Bendigo, Dookie and Churchill, in addition to existing traps in Parkville, Burwood and Geelong.

Last month we also rolled out a new public health information and education campaign to better prepare Victorians for thunderstorm asthma. At risk Victorians are being urged to protect themselves this pollen season by speaking to their GP or pharmacist to put in place their asthma plan.

The forecasting system will run from 1 October until the end of December, the typical Victorian grass pollen season. To access the forecasts, Victorians should download the Vic Emergency App or visit www.emergency.vic.gov.au/prepare.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Jill Hennessy

"Last year's unprecedented epidemic thunderstorm asthma event was the largest ever recorded in the world. If it happens again, we will be ready."

"Our new epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecasting and warning system means Victorians will have the information they need to stay safe this pollen season."

Quotes attributable to Victorian Chief Health Officer Professor Charles Guest

"We want everyone – especially people with asthma and hay fever – to be as prepared as they can be for thunderstorm asthma."

"Pollen grass season is underway, so at risk Victorians should speak to their GP or a pharmacist about what they can do to protect themselves."

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