



AGPN's Immunisation team
Helen Moore and Deborah Halloran
Wish you a very Merry Christmas and a
Safe and Happy New Year

- ❖ If you are going to be out and about over the Christmas and New Year period, maybe a Pertussis vaccination should be on the list to keep everyone healthy and well.
- ❖ Just a reminder that January is the time to ensure all 4 year olds are fully immunised, particularly those heading off to Pre-School in 2009.
- ❖ For those of you travelling overseas this Christmas/New Year period, remember your travel vaccines.....

"Because you never know what's on the menu...

...or what may bite you.

...or what you can catch!"

As Sanofi Pasteur points out...

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Information contained within this newsletter is intended to inform you on immunisation issues with a national perspective. As such, it is possible that some references will require adjustment to be made specifically accurate for service providers in each individual State or Territory jurisdiction. For further clarification, contact your SBO Immunisation Coordinator or jurisdiction Health Department. AGPN acknowledges the financial support of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.



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HPV program – latest update

The Commonwealth has announced a variation to the end date for the HPV program to allow as many women as possible to take up the opportunity of free HPV vaccine.

The community-based HPV catch-up program (delivered through general practice and community immunisation services), is provided for:

- 12-13* to 18 year old girls who have not completed their course at school; and
- 18 to 26 year old women.

The program finishes on 30 June 2009, so to be eligible for free vaccine, all females in the above age groups must have started the course with their first dose of the vaccine on or before 30 June 2009, and complete all 3 doses by 31 December 2009.

*Note: Eligibility is from the age of the first year of secondary school in your State or Territory. It may be 12 or 13 years old. Contact your State or Territory Health Department for details.

Influenza vaccine effective in young children

New research from the University of Rochester, New York suggests that the flu vaccine is likely to significantly protect children in the age group 6 – 59 months even when the strains of flu and vaccine are not an optimal match.

The research team studied children being treated for acute respiratory infections during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 influenza seasons. “There was an almost 60% reduction in influenza-related medical visits among the 6 – 59 month old children who received all recommended doses of the influenza vaccine compared to unvaccinated children in one of the two influenza seasons we studied (2004-2005),” Katherine W. Eisenberg from the University of Rochester, told Reuters Health.

The research team also found that children who required two vaccine doses and only received one were not protected from the flu virus. The research team stressed the importance of these results as they found that vaccination was relatively effective in preventing the flu even when the strains of flu vaccine and the strains of flu circulating in the community were suboptimal.

26 November 2008, Reuters Health E-Line <http://www.reutershealth.com/en/index.html>

‘Schoolies week’ Meningococcal health alert

Brisbane South Population Health Unit responded to a case of **meningococcal disease** at the Gold Coast recently during schoolies week. The Public Health Units involved responded quickly organising antibiotics for close contacts and also responding to media concerns. Parents who have children attending the end of school year celebrations and have concerns over the health alert can contact their nearest Population Health Unit. See www.gppartners.com.au for contact details. Information sheets on Meningococcal Disease can be found on Queensland Health website <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/> .

This is an opportunity to encourage Meningococcal C vaccination.

Debra El Saadi, Manager Queensland Health Communicable Disease Prevention and Control, Communicable Diseases Branch, Qld Health

Vaccinate family members to protect newborns from influenza

Researchers at Duke Children's Hospital, USA have found that vaccinating new mothers before they leave the hospital may provide protection from influenza for newborn babies. Newborn babies are too young to be vaccinated but they are also in the high risk category and have the highest hospitalisation rates compared to other age groups. The study also proved effective in boosting immunization rates for new fathers and siblings.

The study was carried out at Durham Regional Hospital from October 2007 to February 2008. The researchers found that vaccination coverage for the new mothers and their families increased by 16% during the trial period.

10 November 2008, [Health & Medicine Week](#)

"Aussie influenza" latest strain of deadly virus

The latest strain of influenza named the "Australian Flu" is being predicted as the worst flu virus for Europe in twenty years. Mass flu vaccination campaigns have begun in a number of European countries, including Spain and Italy. Italian health officials have already reported 3 cases of "Australian Flu".

3 December 2008, [Daily Telegraph](#)

Calls for more flexible approach to vaccine funding

The University of New South Wales (UNSW) believes that governments need to take a broader perspective when considering funding vaccination programs. Professor Raina MacIntyre, head of the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at UNSW said recently that the influenza vaccine is available for the over 65yo's and those over 50 with a chronic disease and believes the program could be much more cost effective if made available to children.

A paper released from UNSW suggested a broader national vaccination program would help cut sick leave, improve productivity and protect others.

The UNSW paper also considers other vaccination programs such as chickenpox, shingles and hepatitis A.

12 November 2008, Media Release, [University of New South Wales \(UNSW\)](#)

Possible cervical cancer vaccine for boys

Trials run by CSL's partner Merck, have found that vaccinations of Gardasil in males aged 16 to 26 reduce the risk of developing genital warts and other lesions. The trial found from early analysis of a phase 3 study that 90% fewer men vaccinated with Gardasil developed genital warts and precancerous lesions. This was a study of 4000 boys and young men where the Gardasil was tested against a placebo.

Sexual health experts believe the results encourage vaccination in boys as well as girls.

The vaccination is currently approved in Australia for boys aged 9 – 15 but is not funded under the HPV program. CSL is not likely to make a submission for funding until the end of 2010.

http://www.merck.com/newsroom/press_releases/research_and_development/2008_1113.html

Extra GP training places

The Federal Government has pledged to increase GP training numbers to 812 a year from 2011 onwards. It comes after the government's recent decision to lift the GP training cap from 600 places to 712 a year by 2010.

There will also be more funding for GPs and private and public hospitals to train the new generation of medical students, nurses and allied health workers. A new package includes direct subsidies for clinical placements.

Australian Doctor, 5 December 2008

Vaccinations and autism

In response to media attention often given to vaccines, autism and other concerns, the Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) have reprinted an excerpt from *Baby 411: Clear Answers & Smart Advice for Your Baby's First Year*, co-authored by Dr Ari Brown, MD, FAAP. The excerpt contains questions and answers covering vaccines, autism, do vaccines cause autism and other concerns over vaccines.

You can view the article on the following link: www.vaccineinformation.org

COAG places emphasis on prevention and stronger primary health care

The media release from David Butt, CEO, AGPN welcomes some key elements of reform for preventative health measures, improving Indigenous health and investment to train more doctors, nurses and allied health staff.

David also noted the position of Australia's General Practice Network being in a key position "to assist in implementation of these reforms through our primary health care and general practice network.

The CEO's media release can be found on AGPN's web page www.agpn.com.au/media_release

New drug safety watchdog on way

Part of the reforms from the Rudd government will see the Adverse Drug Reactions Advisory Committee being replaced by the Medicines Safety Committee. This new committee will have broader powers than the previous committee. The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) spokesperson said "there were a number of enhancements proposed to the pharmacovigilance framework for prescription medicines".

Some of the changes will include drug audits, review risk management plans of drug companies for approved medicines, surveillance of prescription drugs after approval to be sold.

The TGA plans to improve access to drug data, increase transparency and release more information about listed drugs.

6th – 7th December 2008, Weekend Australian

Cancer test company in global drive

Cellscreen Direct has created a self-administered test for HPV. The test, which can be taken at home, has been approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration and allows women to collect a sample for HPV testing. The aim of the company is to encourage more women to be screened for the disease.

Dr Michael Wooldridge, a director of Cellscreen Direct, and Dr Kerryn Phelps, former AMA chief have both supported the companies product. The company has applied to sell the product in the USA and then plans to market in Europe in early 2009.

December 10 2008, The Age

Health report pushes electronic data collection

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare have released a new report in support of a national electronic data collection system. The report looked at how to collect information in the future for policy making, service decisions, and clinical decisions. The report also discussed accessing of data when a client moves to another location and doctor.

10 December 2008, ABC online

Hypersensitivity to HPV vaccine rare

Researchers have found that true hypersensitivity to the HPV vaccine (Gardasil) is uncommon. More than 380,000 doses were administered in schools in Victoria and SA in 2007. 25 girls included in the study had a reaction after the first dose, and only one experienced a reaction after the third dose. Researchers say that further studies are required.

12 December 2008, Australian Doctor

HPV register – the latest news!!

All the details about the new HPV register are available online at www.hpvregister.org.au.

All GPs have been contacted by letter to inform them of the process of submitting data to the register and how payments for the lodgement of this data will be made. Many have already received their payments from Medicare Australia for lodgement of the data. The register has already released notification numbers to Medicare Australia to ensure payment of over \$2.8 million to GPs.

Information about collecting the HPV data and printing reports can be found on the following site:

<http://www.adgp.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=1813#HPV>

The notification payments will not be made unless the GP has returned their registration form with bank account details and the correct provider number.

As at 5/12/2008 VCS have received the following registrations:

State	# GP's sent Registration letters	Data entered this week	Total Registered	% Registered
NT	254	9	111	43.70%
SA	1870	14	1462	78.18%
ACT	369	8	242	65.58%
Tas	608	2	377	62.01%
WA	2089	38	1468	70.27%
NSW	7703	126	5214	67.69%
Vic	5694	90	4093	72%
Qld	3903	174	2630	67%
State unknown		6	138	
Total	22490	467	15735	69.96%

GPs will commence receiving access accounts and will be able to log onto the register from March 2009

It is important that GP do not report doses to the register that have been administered through schools or councils as these will appear as duplicate data. Councils and State Health Departments are responsible for uploading vaccinations administered through schools and councils.

If practices collect immunisation information for their patients from councils or schools for their own software records, it is important to filter these out before sending the notifications to the HPV Register.

Medicare – slashing red tape and boosting prevention

Medicare items are currently being reviewed and red tape is to be 'slashed' with the Rudd Government expecting to finalise details by March 2009.

The aim is to help GP's give longer consultations to patients where needed and simplify health checks currently on the schedule, making life easier for GPs, patients and health professionals. This will help more people gain access to important prevention advice. The new schedule will take effect from 1 July 2009.

Rabies identified in Bali

The Indonesian Government has formally declared that rabies is present in Bali, with two dogs having been diagnosed with the virus. Previously Bali was considered rabies free; hence this presents a new risk to Australians visiting Bali.

The Indonesian media have also reported that several people with rabies-like clinical signs and symptoms have died after being bitten by dogs. There is at present no indication that the disease has spread to animals other than dogs. However any animal should be considered to pose a potential risk.

All adults and children visiting Bali should avoid contact with wild and domestic animals, including dogs, cats and monkeys, even if the animal appears well. Anyone who is bitten or scratched by an animal in a rabies-affected area, including Bali should immediately wash the wound well with soap and water, apply an antiseptic such as povidone iodine to the wound and see a doctor as soon as possible for the next course of action.

Anyone who has been bitten or scratched by any animal in Bali since 1 August 2008 should see their general practitioner for advice. People bitten or scratched by an animal before this time are not thought to be at risk of rabies.

Rabies is transmitted when viruses in a rabid animal's saliva get into nerve cells through a wound – usually following a bite or a scratch. While many rabid animals will be sick and may go on to die, some appear well.

Symptoms in humans may include headache, fever, feeling unwell, sensory changes around the site of the bite or scratch, excitability, an aversion to fresh air and water, weakness, delirium, convulsions, and coma. Symptoms in humans normally begin within several weeks but sometimes the symptoms begin years after infection. Death usually follows several days after the onset of symptoms.

There is no treatment for rabies once the symptoms have started however treatment of infected people before they develop symptoms can be effective.

Rabies is a vaccine-preventable disease, but it is still a significant public health problem in many countries of Asia and Africa, where most of the 55,000 deaths annually occur.

For a copy of the NSW Health fact sheet on rabies go to
<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/infectious/rabiesbatinfection.html>

Mistletoe extract could kiss tumours goodbye

A University of Canberra research fellow is studying mistletoe to see if it can be used to treat cancer. Dr Simson is head of the immunotherapy group at UC. In her laboratory studies, Dr Simson has discovered that mistletoe extract appears to target and kill tumour cells whilst leaving the healthy cells alone.

Mistletoe is a natural product that has been used in European countries as a complementary treatment for cancer.

Dr Simson said the plant needed further scientific evaluation before being put into use in Australia and is studying the traditional Christmas pine tree mistletoe. She also plans to study varieties of Australian mistletoe as well

15 December 2008, The Canberra Times

