

Australia's general practice immunisation newsletter

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Happy New Year!

We hope you enjoyed your summer break and look forward to another wonderful year for immunisation in 2008 in which we remain vigilant and work to overcome complacency.

Back to school

With the summer holidays drawing to a close and children soon to head back to school, now is the time to remember the importance of child vaccinations. It is particularly important to check four year olds' immunisation status before they head off to school.

A child's first year at school is a time when they are exposed to many new childhood diseases. Immunisation is the only effective way of giving protection against childhood diseases. The benefit of protection against disease far outweighs the very small risks of immunisation. Children who are four years of age should receive booster doses of vaccines that protect against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough), polio and measles, mumps and rubella. All these vaccines can be safely administered by GPs in the one visit.

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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.

'Back to school' media release template

AGPN has prepared a media release template for divisions to use in their local 'back to school' immunisation campaigns. Easy to use, you just download, add in your details and send off to your local newspaper and schools! The template is available from the AGPN immunisation website:

www.adgp.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=1813&filter=i&leca=63&did=59288528#Backtoschool

Record grant aims to eradicate polio

The Gates Foundation has awarded The Rotary Foundation a challenge grant of US \$100 million which The Rotary Foundation will match dollar for dollar over a three year period. This will provide a much needed US\$200 million in support of a polio-free world. This is the largest single grant ever given to a volunteer service organisation.

"The most important aspect of this grant is, of course, the opportunity it provides to quickly fund the most critical areas of need" says Robert S. Scott, Trustee Chair of The Rotary Foundation. "We will now have more resources to promote National Immunization Days, carry out effective surveillance and mop-up campaigns, and respond rapidly to outbreaks in polio-free countries."

Since 1985, Rotary has made polio eradication its top priority and has contributed \$633 million to the effort. The full statement is on the Rotary International website - www.rotary.org

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Flu season starts soon!

Although we are still enjoying the heat of the summer it is time to begin planning programs to help fight flu in the community. The "Fight Flu" campaign will be launched shortly along with a new set of posters and promotional material. More details will be provided next month.

Vaxigrip junior® funded

AGPN is excited to hear that the Australian Government Department of Health and Aging will be funding Vaxigrip junior® under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from 1st January 2008. Vaxigrip junior® is a new form of influenza vaccine suitable for children up to 35 months of age who are at risk of adverse consequences from lower respiratory tract infections (chest infections). This will provide doctors with a more convenient form of influenza vaccine for young children.

Rubella outbreak sparks concerns

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A recent outbreak of rubella (also known as German measles) has been reported in Sydney with at least four babies less than 12 months having been infected with the highly contagious disease in the past few weeks. Rubella is not normally a serious illness, but it can cause complications in pregnant women - if a woman is infected between the 8th and 12th week of pregnancy, about 90% of babies have some form of deformity. Doctors should urge women who are trying to get pregnant, or in early stages of pregnancy to check their immunity to the disease.

Children are now routinely vaccinated for measles, mumps and rubella at 12 months and four years, however many adults (particularly men born between 1966 and 1985) have not received the vaccine and, as a result, don't have immunity. Reduced population immunity can lead to a potential outbreak at any

time. It is therefore imperative that patients visit their GP to check their immunity to the disease and get a booster vaccine if immunity levels are low.

Symptoms of rubella can include a fine rash (often mistaken for heat rash) and fever, arthritis or painful joints, headache, swollen lymph glands, a cough, runny nose and conjunctivitis.

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Comvax and Pedvax unavailable

For states and territories that have used these vaccines on their schedules there will be a change from 1 March 2008.

Due to a manufacturing problem in the USA, CSL/Merck have advised that Comvax and Pedvax vaccines will be out of stock from March until the end of 2008.

As a result some jurisdictions will have to change the childhood immunisation schedule from 1 March 2008 for infants at 2, 4, 6 and 12 months.

Those jurisdictions involved have already circulated the changes necessary to deal with this situation. If you have not heard from these authorities, it is important to contact your local public health or department of health officers for the details for your jurisdiction.

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Rotavirus

The long awaited Immunisation Provider Guidelines booklet is now available in pdf form from the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing Immunise Australia website. The link is as follows;

[www.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/content/A008BA27166C36CACA25735A001521AD/\\$FILE/rotavirus-provider.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/content/A008BA27166C36CACA25735A001521AD/$FILE/rotavirus-provider.pdf)

Japanese Encephalitis (JE) vaccine shortage

There is a temporary shortage of the JE vaccine in Australia and a number of other countries. Although the Department of Health and Ageing is seeking alternative supplies of the vaccine, there could be a shortage for up to 2 years. The Department has been working together with other Commonwealth agencies and jurisdictions to prioritise the use of the remaining stock of the vaccine.

Under the prioritisation plan, current stocks have been prioritised to address the needs of Australian residents at risk of contracting the virus. Vaccines will be supplied for travellers with a priority for Australians who are required to travel overseas for and on behalf of the government to areas where there is a high risk of contracting the virus. Only those who have been assessed as at highest risk of exposure are to be vaccinated. The highest risk is among those spending one month or more in a rural area in an endemic country where one or more of the following conditions strictly applies:

- the period of stay includes the transmission season (wet season in south-east Asia; summer/autumn in temperate Asian regions);
- flooding irrigation is practiced in the area;
- the person will be engaged in considerable outdoor activity;
- the standard of accommodation is suboptimal.

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For any person travelling to a JE endemic area, the importance of mosquito avoidance measures should be stressed and detailed information provided on how best to protect themselves against mosquito bites. A fact Sheet on JE and the JE vaccine shortage can be accessed at:

[www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/BC8EB8E87AB496D7CA25739B00143B64/\\$File/je-7-jan08.pdf](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/BC8EB8E87AB496D7CA25739B00143B64/$File/je-7-jan08.pdf)

HPV Reminder

The funded HPV vaccine will be available for 18 to 26 year old women until June 30 2009. As the course of the immunisation takes 6 months it is important to remind women in that age group to take advantage of the offer of the free vaccine as soon as possible.

TGA update on HPV Vaccine (Gardasil®)

The TGA has recently updated their information sheet on the Human Papillomavirus Vaccine (Gardasil®). It can be found online at www.tga.gov.au/alerts/medicines/gardasil.htm.

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9th Edition Handbook

The 9th edition of the immunisation handbook is on its way! We are hoping that it will be available in the next couple of months and have been assured by the Department of Health and Ageing that all providers will be sent a copy as soon as it is released. If you do not receive one after it has been released please contact your division, your local state or territory health department or you can order on line at:

www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/publications

NICS Evidence into Action prize

A NICS Evidence into Action prize, which includes prize-money of \$1,000, is being offered to Divisions of General Practice to encourage participation in influenza immunisation programs that will:

- raise awareness of this important evidence-practice gap
- support health professionals understand and overcome barriers to increase influenza immunisation rates
- initiate and support activities that promote successful approaches to increasing influenza immunisation rates, and
- integrates the routine uptake of evidence into systems established to improve quality and accountability in the area of influenza immunisation.

The winning submission will receive their award and be invited to present their work at the 2008 AGPN Immunisation workshop.

For more information or to apply for this fantastic prize, simply download and complete the submission form from www.agpn.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=1813&filter=i&leca=63&did=40661304#NICS

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