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Labor's health checks for school kids gets a big tick

Labor's plan to produce a health checklist for children starting school has been welcomed in principle by Australia's peak body representing general practice, the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN).

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said a well designed health check list would provide parents with an excellent guide to ensure the best of health for their children as they start their schooling.

"The beginning of the school year serves as a timely reminder for parents to think about how best to keep their children healthy.

"Up-to-date immunisations, a healthy diet, regular exercise and eye and skin care are all important for the long-term good health of children.

"Quite often when children start school the new school bag and new shoes take priority. A simple health checklist will help parents to prepare their children for the big wide world," Dr Hobbs said.

The list could be tied in with the four year old booster immunisations and could include eye tests and simple height and weight range checks.

GPs, practice nurses and other allied health professionals such as optometrists can play a part in seeing Australia's newest students have a healthier start at school.

Dr Hobbs said being fully immunised at the school entry age is critical as it protects children against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, measles, mumps and rubella.

"Four and five year olds are at an interesting time in their lives. They are often starting at a new school and coming into contact with a much larger group of people, making them more at risk of coming into contact with diseases," Dr Hobbs said.

A proposal to link a health check to the four year old immunisation has been put to the Federal Government by AGPN in their budget submission.

As children visit their GP and get their immunisations, there is an opportunity to have some general health tests conducted and discuss healthy weight ranges.

Obesity creates not only physical problems but emotional ones as well, particularly in relation to bullying.

"GPs are well placed to work with parents to help their children loose weight, allowing for them to be happier and healthier in their first year at school. They are also able to refer patients to other allied health professionals such as dieticians if necessary.

AGPN CEO Kate Carnell said she would welcome the opportunity to contribute to a round table discussion as suggested by the Shadow Health Minister, Nicola Roxon.

"We look forward to discussing in more detail how general practice delivers local health solutions targeted at school age children, with parent groups, educationalists and the Shadow Minister " Ms Carnell said.

For media interviews please phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell on 0415 66 22 66