



Strengthening Immunisation for Children

The Government is introducing reforms to Australia's childhood immunisation arrangements that aim to increase the immunisation rates of Australian children over time.

These changes mean:

- Families will now need to have their children fully immunised to receive the existing \$726 per child Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement, replacing the Maternity Immunisation Allowance from 1 July 2012.
- A new immunisation check will be introduced for one year olds to supplement the existing focus on immunisation at two and five years of age from 1 July 2012.
- The meningococcal C, pneumococcal and varicella ('chickenpox') vaccines will be included in the list of immunisations that are needed for a child to be fully immunised from 1 July 2013.
- A combination vaccine for measles, mumps, rubella and varicella ('chickenpox') for children aged 18 months will be added to the National Immunisation Program Schedule from 1 July 2013.

Why is the Government acting?

Immunisation is the safest and most effective way of giving protection against a disease.

Vaccination not only protects individuals, but also others in the community, by reducing the spread of disease. Increasing the level of immunity in the community protects those people who cannot be vaccinated because they are too young or because of medical reasons.

Immunisation rates in Australia are now the highest on record and, as a result, notification rates of vaccine-preventable diseases are low. However, they still exist. For example, in 2010 there were 66 cases of measles in children aged under 10 years in Australia, a

disease that can have serious consequences including death.

Most families immunise their children but some children are not vaccinated on time or as recommended in accordance with the National Immunisation Program Schedule, risking their child's health and the health of other children.

What changes will be made?

Stronger incentives

From 1 July 2012, parents will need to have had their children fully vaccinated during the financial years that each child turns one, two and five years of age to receive the \$726 Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement (for each child each year). Immunisation is already a condition for Australian Government child care payments.

These new requirements will replace the Maternity Immunisation Allowance, which provided \$129 when a child was immunised between 18 months and 24 months of age and between four and five years of age. Immunisations after 1 July 2012 will no longer attract the allowance.

The addition of a third age checkpoint (at one year) will help make sure important early vaccinations are received at the medically recommended times (at two, four and six months of age).

The new arrangements will create a stronger financial incentive for parents. Over three immunisation check points, families will have a \$2,100 incentive to ensure their child is fully immunised.

To meet the immunisation requirements children will need to be fully immunised, be on a recognised immunisation catch up schedule or have an approved exemption.

Extra vaccinations required

The meningococcal C, pneumococcal and varicella ('chickenpox') vaccines are currently listed on the National Immunisation Program Schedule. From 1 July 2013, these vaccines will be added to the list of immunisations that children need to receive to be assessed as fully immunised to receive the Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement and Australian Government child care payments.

New combination vaccine added

From 1 July 2013, the combination vaccine Priorix-Tetra will be added to the National Immunisation Program. This will replace individual doses of the MMR vaccine (for measles, mumps and rubella) and the varicella vaccine (for chickenpox).

This will reduce the number of vaccines children receive by one. Children will also be protected against measles, mumps and rubella at 18 months of age, rather than four years of age under the existing schedule. Listing the combination vaccine will cost \$15.7 million over four years.

Overall, these changes will deliver savings of \$209.1 million over four years.

What do families need to do?

The Australian Government will write to all families who are affected to explain the changes, and what immunisations their children need.

Families then need to make sure their children receive all the listed immunisations.

The Family Assistance office will check whether a child is assessed by the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register as being fully immunised (or has an approved exemption) at the end of the financial year when a family's payments are reconciled and the Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement is provided. This happens after parents lodge their tax returns.

Further information about the changes to payments for families can be found at www.fahcsia.gov.au.

How will immunisation providers be informed about these new changes?

The Department of Health and Ageing in consultation with state and territory health departments, Medicare Australia and peak medical groups will be implementing an extensive communication strategy aimed at informing all immunisation providers about the changes and the proposed implementation approach.

This will occur over the coming months, ensuring all providers are fully informed of the new requirements prior to commencement in 1 July 2012.

What is the Government already doing to support immunisation?

The Immunise Australia Program implements the National Immunisation Program Schedule, which currently includes vaccines against a total of 16 diseases.

The Australian Government provides funding for:

- free vaccines under the National Immunisation Program
- the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) that records details of vaccines given to children under seven years of age
- notification payments to immunisation providers that report vaccines administered to the ACIR
- the General Practice Immunisation Incentives Scheme to provide financial incentives for monitoring, promoting and providing appropriate immunisation services to children
- facilitation and reward payment to states and territories to deliver the National Immunisation Program in their jurisdictions.

Further information on the Immunise Australia Program can be found at www.immunise.health.gov.au.