



Newsletter of the Community Consultative Committee - April 2009

Editorial

A whooping cough outbreak is continuing in NSW with more than 3000 cases reported this year. Timely immunisation of infants and carers is important. Unvaccinated infants are at highest risk of infection and at high risk of complications. More information about this contagious disease is in this issue.

The IDGP Cervical Screening Program is well underway with a greater availability of RNs in general practice to undertake Pap smears and plans for a targeted community education. The breakthrough in having a vaccination for the prevention of cervical cancer needs to be understood with the necessity for women to continue having regular Pap tests. The Program Coordinator Beth Bignell has written about this very preventable cancer.

Older drivers usually depend on their good health to remain safe and competent drivers. Recently I underwent surgery for cataracts which had developed in both eyes. The precipitating factor was an inability to drive at night because the glare from the lights of other cars was blinding. After the operations, my surgeon advised me that because I am no longer short sighted it is necessary to inform the RTA that I don't need spectacles to drive. I have done this and have been issued with a new licence at no cost to me. This experience has prompted the article about Medical and Driving Tests .

On a lighter note, the presentation of the Nintendo Wii to the Farnborough Aged Care Centre was very pleasant. Seeing residents engage in playing games and enjoying the camaraderie of those surrounding them warms the heart – a great idea of Dr Jim Turner.

Patricia Noferi
Editor

Freebies

- Some doctors in the Illawarra bulk bill or do so in conjunction with particular procedures.
- The Department of Health and Ageing has extended the access to the free cervical cancer vaccine until December 2009 provided the first shot has been received by June 30th 2009. If young women do not access the vaccine for free it will be available from 2010 at a cost of \$450 for the three shots.
- For a limited time, FREE dTpa (BOOSTRIX) – whooping cough vaccine will be available for all new parents, grandparents and any other adults who will regularly care for infants less than 12 months of age.



Newsletter of the Community Consultative Committee of the Illawarra Division of General Practice (IDGP). The IDGP is an organisation which supports and represents General Practitioners. It was developed to provide opportunities for GPs to work with their local colleagues, consumers and other health or community services. It aims to achieve wider health improvements in the community.

Cervical Cancer and Cervical Screening and Immunisation

Death from cervical cancer is tragic because it is one of the most preventable and curable of all cancers. Up to 90% of the most common form of cervical cancer could be prevented if all women had regular two-yearly Pap tests. This cancer is becoming less common in Australia since the introduction of cervical cancer screening, and now a further safeguard in its prevention is the introduction of a new vaccine.

What Causes Cervical Cancer

Long term infection with certain types of the human papilloma virus (HPV) is now known to be the cause of almost all cervical cancers. Anyone who has ever had sex can have HPV. It is so common that four out of five people will have had HPV at some time during their life. In most cases HPV clears up untreated over a period of one to two years. Occasionally, the virus can persist and if left undetected and untreated can develop into cervical cancer. It usually takes about 10 years for HPV to develop into cervical cancer. For this reason it is recommended that women have a Pap test every two years to detect any abnormal cell changes which can then be monitored and/or treated. In the early stages of cervical cancer there are usually no symptoms, so that the only way to detect changes is by a Pap test.

Having a Pap test (smear) is a simple and quick test that only takes a few minutes and is completely safe. A small spatula or brush is used to wipe the cells from the cervix, which are then smeared onto a slide and sent to a laboratory to be tested. Having a Pap test can feel uncomfortable, but it should not hurt. However, older women who experience dry vagina should consult their GP before having the test.

What are the recommendations for Pap Tests

All women over 18 who have ever had sex are advised to have a Pap test every two years, even if they no longer have sex. If a woman starts sexual activity at a younger age, screening should start within two years of first sexual intercourse. Your GP may recommend more frequent Pap tests if a previous Pap test showed significant cell changes. The risk of getting cervical cancer increases with age. About half of the new cases of cervical cancer diagnosed each year are in women over 50 years of age. The current recommendation is that women can stop having Pap tests if they are 70 years or over and have had two normal tests within the previous five years.



HPV Vaccine

HPV vaccine is best administered before sexual activity starts, to prevent infection from HPV. The Australian government has funded a HPV vaccination program for Australian girls and women aged 12 to 26 years. The HPV vaccine GARDASIL® will be provided on an ongoing basis for girls in Year 7 at school. A catch-up program for young women aged 12 to 18 was conducted in all NSW high schools in 2007 and 2008. Women aged 18 to 26 years can receive free HPV vaccination from their local GP, however the funding for this vaccine ends this year, and as it is a three dose course, to be eligible for the free vaccine, women 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.

The HPV vaccine does not protect against all the HPV types that can cause cervical cancer. All women, whether vaccinated against HPV or not, should have regular two yearly Pap tests.

Where can you have a Pap Test in the Illawarra

It is important to choose a person and place where you feel comfortable. Many GP's now have female nurses who can perform the Pap test for you. Please talk to your GP or contact the Illawarra Women's Health Centre for an appointment for a Pap test Illawarra Women's Health Centre at Warilla (Ph: 4255 6800)

Information in this article has been sourced from the Cancer Institute NSW

Whooping Cough Epidemic

Infants catching whooping cough from adults

The Illawarra is currently experiencing an upsurge in the number of recorded cases of whooping cough. The increase is being attributed in some circles to a drop in immunisation rates, but some children are still contracting the condition, despite being immunised against it.

Being vaccinated or having had whooping cough does not provide lifelong immunity. Therefore many people who care for young children no longer have immunity even if they were vaccinated as children.

Dr Liz Magassy says whooping cough is highly contagious, particularly for young children.

“A person is infectious for the first 21 days of their coughing or until they have had five days of antibiotics. Because it’s a bacterial infection it can be treated with antibiotics. People contracting the virus after receiving a vaccination tend to get a milder cough.”

Women who contract whooping cough in the last weeks of their pregnancy may pass it on to their vulnerable newborn child if they are not diagnosed and treated.

Winter makes diagnosing whooping cough more difficult as it usually starts with a runny nose, mild fever and tiredness like many other respiratory illnesses. Coughing then develops into bouts which can be followed by a deep gasp or ‘whoop’. Young children can stop breathing during the coughing attacks and require hospitalisation.

Vaccinations for Whooping cough (pertussis) are given at two, four and six months of age. A booster should be given at four years of age and again between 12-17 years of age. Vaccination of parents and carers of children reduces the risk that they may pass Whooping Cough on. Boostrix is a booster vaccination for the prevention of pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria in individuals 10 – 64 years of age, and adults can receive the vaccine by visiting their GP. Keeping infants away from those with a coughing illness, ensuring their vaccinations are up-to-date and also that siblings, parents and carers (often grandparents) are vaccinated, is the best way to protect them.

Source: ABC News 10th Dec 2008 <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/infectious/pertussis.html>.

Medical and Driving Tests

The RTA needs to ensure that all drivers are medically fit and competent to drive. Older drivers and people who have a medical condition can be asked to have regular medical examinations. Some drivers also need to have a periodic driving assessment. If you have a long term injury or illness that may affect your ability to drive safely, the law requires you to notify the RTA as soon as possible.

For drivers with disabilities, your doctor may refer you to an occupational therapist to undergo a driving assessment before a licence may be issued or reissued.

Crash patterns for older drivers are significantly different to those of other age groups. For drivers aged 80 and over, the most common crashes are intersection crashes, where the older driver is turning right across traffic; and crashes where the older driver drives off the road.

At 75 years of age people need to have a medical examination each year to keep their licence. At 85 years of age, in addition to an annual medical examination, people are required to pass a practical driving assessment every second year (age 85, 87, 89 etc) to retain an unrestricted driver licence. If an unrestricted licence is no longer required, opting for a modified licence eliminates the need for further driving assessments.

Sometimes an older person may suffer from, cognitive impairment and lack the insight to stop driving, even though they may no longer have a licence - which creates a dangerous situation both physically and legally. The solution to this problem requires some ingenuity on the part of the family and the GP. In NSW doctors can report patients to the RTA without the patient’s consent and are protected from civil or criminal liability for breaching confidentiality in such cases. However any concerned person can report an unlicensed driver to the RTA.

A Guide to older driver licensing is a publication on driving safely, licence options and the requirements of the practical driving assessment. It is available from any motor registry or by calling 13 22 13.

If you are unable to continue driving, you should return your licence to a motor registry. You may choose to exchange your licence for a NSW Photo Card at no fee.

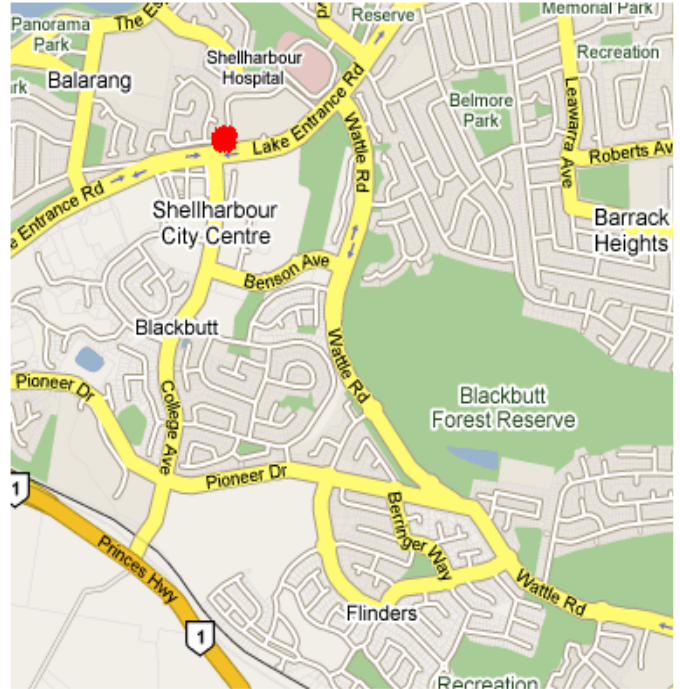
Source: www.rta.nsw.gov.au and www.workingcarers.org.au

New GP Practice in Shellharbour

With Support from the IDGP, Shellharbour Council and UOW a group of three doctors have established a clinical practice in an area that has recently seen the closure of four GP practices. Consequently Shellharbour GP-to-population ratio dropped to the lowest level in the region.

The new practice incorporates an integrated care model which meets the ideal put forward by the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission. Allied health workers including a dietician and psychologist with others soon to join the practice, will provide a team of professionals to meet the needs of patients.

We welcome the new medical practitioners: Dr Soheir Abadier, Dr Bahgat Gerges & Dr George Albert.
2 – 6 College Avenue, Shellharbour NSW 2529
Phone: 4295 1333



Live Life with a Nintendo Wii

As part of NSW Seniors Week, The CCC donated a Ninetendo Wii - the brain child of Dr Jim Turner to the Farnborough Aged Care Centre. Live Life, the theme of Seniors Week this year is definitely a possibility with this fun technology which is an interactive computer game. The viewer scores by participating in activities simulating a game, be it ten pin bowls or tennis or golf – there are several games to choose from.

The physical movement combined with mental stimulation and community participation are enlivening. 'It makes residents' eyes light up and gets them out of their rooms and involved with others' says Dr Turner.

Representatives of other aged care facilities who were invited to the presentation and demonstration of the Nintendo Wii were very interested to see the games being played by residents at the Farnborough Age Care Centre and expressed a strong desire to provide their residents with the same technology.



Never too old: Gordon Trickett and Mary McKeane try their hand at tenpin bowling on the Farnborough Aged Care Centre's Nintendo Wii. The game was a gift to the centre for Seniors Week.