



# MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Health and Ageing

## Tony Abbott MHR

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### GOVERNMENT TO EXTEND FREE VACCINATION PROGRAM

The Commonwealth Government will provide free chickenpox (varicella) vaccine for all babies and for at-risk teenagers and replace oral polio vaccine (OPV) with injectable inactivated polio vaccine (IPV).

These two new vaccinations will be funded under the National Immunisation Program and will commence on 1 November 2005.

The government has responded to recommendations made in late January 2005 by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) which has been reviewing the latest evidence on the effectiveness of these vaccines.

The new vaccines will cost \$143.2 million over five years.

Chickenpox vaccine will be offered free to all children turning 18 months of age. In addition, children aged between 10-13 years who have not received chickenpox vaccine or who have not had the disease will be eligible for free vaccine as part of a long-term catch-up program.

The replacement of oral with injectable polio vaccine will allow the use of a new six-in-one combination vaccine that provides protection against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), hepatitis B, *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) and polio. Because hepatitis B and Hib are included in this new combination vaccine, many babies will receive one less injection at 2 and 4 months of age.

The government has negotiated internationally competitive prices for these vaccines.

In 1996, Commonwealth Government spending on vaccines was \$13 million. With the introduction of these new vaccines, National Immunisation Program spending will reach \$292 million 2005-06, a 22-fold increase.

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