



Australia's general practice immunisation newsletter

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Rotavirus vaccinations funded

On March 28 2007 the Federal Government announced that it will fund rotavirus vaccinations. Rotavirus vaccines will be listed on the National Immunisation Program from July 2007 allowing all babies born from May 1 2007 to benefit from the free vaccine.

This announcement follows the November 2006 decision of the PBAC to approve funding for the rotavirus vaccines. The allocated \$124 million over the next five years will allow all babies born after May 1 2007 to receive the necessary 2 or 3 doses (depending on the product) before they reach 32 weeks of age. Both of the listed vaccines, Rotateq (CSL) and Rotarix (GSK) are oral vaccines. It is important for providers to note the differences between the vaccines as one requires 2 doses and the other 3 doses for maximum protection.

The Northern Territory government has been funding the vaccine for all babies born from August 1st 2006 and will now be able to take advantage of the Federal Government's funding.

Rotavirus is one of the most common causes of infectious gastroenteritis and infant hospitalisations in Australia and affects nearly all children before they turn five. Every year in Australia, rotavirus infections result in approximately 20,000 Emergency Department visits, 10,000 hospital admissions and more than 100,000 GP visits.

For information on rotavirus and the 2 vaccines available, visit the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) fact Sheets directly at http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/facts/f-fact_sheets.html

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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.

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HPV Vaccine Role Out Begins

HPV vaccine will be a major topic of conversation in secondary schools around the country over the next few months with the commencement of the school based vaccination program. Secondary schools will begin distributing consent forms and a brochure provided by the Department of Health and Ageing designed to answer questions for parents of girls who are eligible to receive the vaccine.

The school based program will provide immunisations for girls aged between 12 and 18 years until the end of 2008. After that the program will continue for all girls in their first year of secondary schooling.

The age groups to be vaccinated this year depend on the jurisdiction. Some states are vaccinating girls in years 10, 11, and 12 this year and then years 7, 8, 9 and 10 in 2008. Others states and territories have different year groupings. There is a table below which sets out the role out in different areas.

State/Territory	Second Term commences	Vaccination begins	Years participating 2007	Years participating 2008
ACT	30 April	From 30 April	7, 10, 11, 12	7, 9, 10
NSW	23 April	17 May (metro), rural areas TBC	10, 11, 12	7, 8, 9, 10
NT	16 April	From 16 April	10, 11, 12#	7, 8, 9, 10
QLD	16 April	From 17 April	10, 11, 12	8, 9, 10
SA	30 April	From 2 April	8 to 12	8
Tasmania	Easter break: 6 to 10 April*	From 11 April	7, 10, 11, 12	7, 9, 10
Victoria	16 April	From 16 April	7, 10, 11, 12	7, 9, 10
WA	23 April	From 1 May	10, 11, 12#	7, 8, 9, 10
<p>*Second term in Tasmania commences 18 June; vaccination program will begin following Easter break</p> <p># In some small regions the whole school will be vaccinated in 2007</p> <p>Note that the HPV vaccine will also be added to the ongoing immunisation schedule for 12-13 year olds from 2008</p>				

The optimum vaccination schedule is three doses given over six months, at 0, 2 and 6 months. However, in order to fit three doses into the 2007 school year most states and territories will adhere to a compressed vaccination schedule, with doses given at 0, 1 and 4 months. This will not affect the efficacy of the vaccine.

The school-based program is the primary mechanism for delivering the vaccine to 12-18 year old girls. Parents of girls in this age group are best advised to have their daughters vaccinated at school. However, GPs may be asked to administer the vaccine to girls who are no longer at school, or who have missed doses.

The General Practice program will begin in July 2007 with GPs being asked to vaccinate all girls and women aged 18 to 26 plus those over 12 who are no longer at school or have missed their age group vaccination for some other reason.

The GP program will only continue until June 2009. After this date there will be no funded vaccine available for the older age groups. The HPV program will continue as a funded vaccine for girls in their first year of secondary school only as a school based program. GPs will still be able to provide the vaccine privately.

Up to date information on the programs can be found on the Department of Health and Ageing web site http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/gardasil_hpv.htm

Information on the relationship between Human Papillomavirus and cervical cancer and the vaccine can be found on the NCIRS fact sheet site; http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/facts/hpv_oct_2006.pdf

It is very important to continue to stress the need for all women aged between 18 and 69 to continue with their regular Pap smear tests whether or not they have been vaccinated.

The vaccine that is currently available is licensed for girls 9 to 26 year of age. Although it is licensed for boys 9 to 15 it is not funded for this group.

Collection of the data associated with this vaccine will provide information on the success of the program in later years and also a method of ensuring reminders are sent and all doses of the vaccine are given. All providers are asked to submit the data associated with this vaccine.

GPs can expect to receive further information via direct mailout from the Department of Health and Ageing in the coming weeks.

A dedicated page for GPs, and a downloadable 'cheat sheet' is available from the campaign website – www.australia.gov.au/cervicalcancer - the website also includes detailed information for parents, young women and girls.

Information is also available from the Immunise Australia National Infoline on 1800 671 811.

The 9th Edition of the Australian Immunisation Handbook

A reminder to all to get any changes you feel are necessary for the new Handbook in by 6th April (Good Friday). This will be the hard copy of the Handbook for the next few years so it is important to make sure that it is useable and appropriate. Electronic versions will be updated as they have been previously. It is hoped to have this publication released later in the year.

The new draft edition can be accessed from this web page. To speed up printing or reading of the document it is advisable to save it to your computer first.

<http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/handbook07>

Influenza

With autumn colours appearing in the southern areas, it is appropriate to remind everyone about influenza vaccination. The focus for the "fight flu" campaign this year is to improve the vaccination coverage rates for influenza across the health worker sector. In previous years only 20-50 per cent of health care workers have been vaccinated. This low level not only leaves the health workers at risk, but also allows for carriage of the virus into the work areas and subsequent infection of those under the care of the workers.

The statistics provided by the National Institute for Clinical Studies (NICS) indicate that 1,500 Australians die each year from complications caused by influenza. Less than half the people most at risk of developing life threatening complications from influenza are being vaccinated annually.

The General Practice Network is very much a health care network striving for quality primary health care services across the country. It is important that the influenza messages are taken on board and that this Network leads by example.

Influenza is not a cold. It is a highly contagious disease and vaccination is the most effective protection.

NICS has developed a website to provide the facts about influenza, dispel the myths and provide some tools to help fight flu. <http://www.fightflu.com.au>

Pandemic Flu

Pandemic is a topic that slips easily to the back of our minds, especially when the media hype drops down. However, Pandemic Influenza in Australia is not a case of if but when. And if Australia is to survive a pandemic, we need to be prepared. The Australian and State government have developed plans which will be put in place in the event of a pandemic, however, how each individual business and practice manages depends on how 'pandemic ready' they are.

To this end, each practice needs to develop a plan that helps identify issues that will be arise during a pandemic. Issues including workforce shortages, management of infections patients, triage, care of patients

in the home, etc need to be worked though so that practices are able to manage effectively during and ultimately survive a pandemic. It is imperative that these plans be developed and ready to put in place now as you never know – your next flu patient could be the first case of the pandemic in Australia!

Pandemic Planning for Divisions and General Practices will be a key topic at this year's National Divisions Immunisation Workshop. In the mean time, here are some links to National and State plans to help you start thinking about how 'pandemic ready' you are.

National Pandemic Websites:

National Action Plan for Human Influenza Pandemic:

<http://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/pandemic/index.htm>

Preparing for an Influenza Pandemic - A Practical Guide for Medical Practitioners

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/pubhlth-pandemic-gp.htm>

The Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-pandemic-ahmppi-toc.htm>

State Pandemic Websites and Plans

ACT: <http://www.health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=da&did=10098808&pid=1163390986>

NSW: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pandemic/planning.html>

QLD : <http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/healthyliving/pandemic/index.php>

SA: <http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pandemicinfluenza/Default.aspx?tabid=47>

TAS: <http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/healthyliving/pandemic/index.php>

VIC : <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pandemicinfluenza/professionals.htm>

WA : <http://www.dpc.wa.gov.au/index.cfm?event=pandemicPlanning>

AGPN's Pandemic Flu Website:

<http://www.adgp.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=826>

NCIRS Fact Sheets

The National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) provides expert and relevant information concerning immunisation and vaccine preventable diseases. The centre produces Fact Sheets which are an excellent resource.

The NCIRS website can be found at <http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/> and the Fact Sheets can be accessed directly at http://www.ncirs.usyd.edu.au/facts/f-fact_sheets.html

National Divisions Immunisation Workshop

The National Divisions Immunisation Workshop has previously been held biannually in conjunction with the Public Health Association's Immunisation conference. This year it will be held in conjunction with the Nurses in General Practice Forum in late August at Coffs Harbour NSW.

The Immunisation Workshop will begin on Wednesday evening August 29th with an informal networking dinner and divisional presentations with the main workshop starting with a breakfast session on the Thursday 30th morning and continuing until 2.30 pm. The early start and early finish is designed to enable delegates to catch flights out of Coffs Harbour if necessary.

Australian General Practice Network Forum

The ninth annual General Practice Forum will be held in Hobart from the **15-19 November 2007**. Information on the program, accommodation and associated events will be publicised as soon as they are released.