

National Indigenous Immunisation: Message Stick Newsletter empowering the community with the knowledge of the importance of immunisation

Issue: May 2019



Immunisation schedules

NCIRS immunisation schedules

Childhood schedule

The [NCIRS childhood immunisation schedule](#) summarises immunisation recommendations for infants, children and adolescents in Australia. It includes childhood vaccinations funded under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) as well as other recommendations for children in accordance with [The Australian Immunisation Handbook](#).

Occasionally, the ages at which some NIP vaccines are administered and the brand of vaccine used will vary among states and territories. Therefore it is important to also check the immunisation schedule for your area (refer to state and territory immunisation schedules).

Adult schedule

The [NCIRS adult immunisation schedule](#) summarises immunisation recommendations for adults in Australia. It includes vaccines that are funded for adults under the NIP as well as other recommendations for adults in accordance with [The Australian Immunisation Handbook](#). Adults may require additional doses of certain vaccines to what is outlined in this schedule if they did not receive adequate vaccine doses during their childhood (as a result of either certain vaccines not being available at that time or later schedule changes).

NIP schedule

The NIP schedule is a series of immunisation given at specific times throughout a person's life. The immunisations range from birth through adulthood. All vaccines listed in the NIP schedule are funded by the federal government.

[National Immunisation Program Schedule](#)

State and territory immunisation schedules

There may be slight variations in the immunisation schedules of states and territories.

[Australian Capital Territory](#)

[New South Wales](#)

[Victoria](#)

[Queensland](#)

[South Australia](#)

[Western Australia](#)

[Northern Territory](#)

[Tasmania](#)

World Immunisation Week – Protect our children from preventable diseases

World Immunisation Week (April 24–30) is an opportunity for us to refocus our attention on ensuring all Australian children are safe from preventable diseases by having them immunised.

This year's theme 'Protected Together, #VaccinesWork' encourages everyone to make a greater effort to increase immunisation coverage to protect our kids.

Australia's vaccination rate for five-year-olds is one of the best in the world, and the national immunisation rate for five-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (96.2 per cent) is even higher than that for all Australian children aged five (94.0 per cent).

This is great news but we can't rest until all five-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are protected against vaccine preventable diseases. While national and state vaccination rates are high, there are still geographical areas with lower coverage, and some children are receiving their vaccinations later than clinically recommended.

Skipping or delaying vaccinations puts children and those around them at risk of contracting serious diseases. It's important that children receive their vaccine on time, every time, for the best protection.



Figure 1. Photo by Bobbi - Lee Hille photography

The World Immunisation Week is a timely reminder of the need to remain ever vigilant about vaccine preventable diseases and increasing Australia's immunisation rates.

The 2019 National Immunisation Program seasonal influenza vaccines are now available. People are encouraged to do their part by booking in for their flu jab.

The flu vaccine – your best shot at stopping the flu

Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in 2019

- Vaccination is the most effective way of reducing the spread of influenza in the community.
- To protect yourself from influenza, you should get vaccinated every year. The influenza virus is always changing so the influenza vaccine changes too.
- Getting the vaccine from April will protect you before the peak influenza period, from around June to September, in most parts of Australia.
- Let your immunisation provider know your age or the age of your child before getting the influenza shot. The brand of influenza vaccine you get depends on your age.
- The influenza vaccine is free under the National Immunisation Program for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged six months and over.
- The influenza vaccine does not contain any live virus, so you cannot get influenza from the vaccine.

What is influenza?

Influenza is caused by a virus that can infect your nose, throat and sometimes lungs. It spreads easily from person to person through coughing, sneezing and close contact, such as kissing and sharing food and drinks.

Influenza symptoms such as fever, headache, tiredness and muscle aches can start suddenly. Elderly people might also experience confusion and children might also get irritable and an upset stomach. Symptoms can last for a week or more. When severe, complications such as pneumonia and worsening of existing medical conditions can lead to hospitalisation and sometimes death.

Why should I get the influenza vaccine?

Vaccination experts recommend that everyone six months and over get vaccinated to reduce their chance of getting influenza.

Every year the influenza vaccine changes to match the influenza virus that is most likely to be around during the influenza season. Getting vaccinated every year is the best way of preventing influenza and its complications.

There is emerging evidence that the influenza vaccine gives the most protection within the first three to four months after it is given. It's important to make sure you are protected in time for when influenza is most common, from around June to September, in most parts of Australia.

Where can I get the influenza vaccine?

You can get the influenza vaccine from a range of immunisation providers which can include general practices (your family GP), community health clinics, Aboriginal Medical Services and others.

Talk to your GP, Aboriginal Health Practitioner or Worker, or nurse to arrange your influenza vaccine.

When should I get the influenza vaccine?

Free influenza vaccines under the National Immunisation Program are available from your vaccination provider from April 2019. Getting vaccinated from April gives you and your children the best protection ready for the peak influenza period, from around June to September, in most parts of Australia.

Influenza vaccines for people aged 65 years and over.

A specific influenza vaccine is available to provide better protection for people aged 65 years and over.

If you are aged 65 years or over, speak to your GP, Aboriginal Health Practitioner or Worker, or nurse to find out more about receiving this specific vaccine. The specific vaccine cannot be given to people aged under 65 years.

Let your immunisation provider know the age of your child before they get their influenza vaccine. This will make sure they receive the correct dose and brand.

If your child is aged six months to less than nine years and has never had the influenza vaccine before, experts recommend they have two doses of influenza vaccine (given at least 4 weeks apart) in the first year they receive the vaccine. After that only one influenza vaccine dose is needed each year.

It is safe to receive the influenza vaccine with other routine childhood vaccines. When a child receives the influenza vaccine and pneumococcal vaccine (Prevenar 13®) together, they may be more likely to develop a fever. Speak to your GP, Aboriginal Health Practitioner or Worker, or nurse if you have any concerns.

Pregnant women (at any stage)

Pregnant women are more likely to be affected by complications from influenza.

Vaccination experts recommend vaccinating against influenza at any stage during pregnancy, and preferably before the influenza season starts.

The vaccine protects pregnant women and their babies during their first months of life when babies are too young to get vaccinated themselves.

Influenza vaccine safety

Some people might experience side effects within one to two days after influenza vaccination. These include soreness, redness, discomfort and swelling at the injection site, tiredness, muscle aches and low fever. These side effects are usually mild and go away within a few days without any treatment.

The influenza vaccine is safe for pregnant women and their unborn babies at any stage during pregnancy and is recommended.

It is safe for people with an egg allergy to have influenza vaccines.

People with a history of serious allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) to egg should receive their influenza vaccine in a medical facility with staff experienced in recognising and treating anaphylaxis.

If you have experienced any of the following talk to your vaccination provider before getting an influenza vaccine:

- a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) following a previous influenza vaccination
- a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to any influenza vaccine ingredient.

You are encouraged to report any concerning event following influenza vaccination to: your local Aboriginal Health Practitioner or Health worker, nurse.

To find out more about influenza and the National Immunisation Program:

- call the National Immunisation Program Information Line: 1800 671 811
- visit the Department of Health's immunisation website at health.gov.au/immunisation





Flu vax for kids: early success, but room for more

Immunisation providers should offer annual influenza vaccination for children aged 6 months to less than 5 years and report it to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR), according to the authors of a perspective published online by the [Medical Journal of Australia](#).

Influenza causes a substantial number of hospitalisations and deaths each year in Australia. Hospitalisation rates for influenza are highest in young children, with annual rates about 200 per 100,000 in children aged 0–5 months, and 100 per 100,000 in those aged 6–23 months, wrote the authors, led by Dr Frank Beard, a public health physician at the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) and a senior lecturer at The University of Sydney. According to the authors, these numbers likely underestimate the true burden of disease because of underascertainment, particularly of influenza-related complications.

While the Australian Immunisation Handbook strongly recommends that children aged 6 months to less than 5 years should receive annual influenza vaccination, the influenza vaccine is only funded under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for children in this age group who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or who have medical conditions that increase the risk for severe influenza.

National influenza vaccine coverage for young children increased in 2018, reaching 25.6% overall and 29.5% in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, which represents a 5-fold increase for non-Indigenous children and a 2-fold increase for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children compared with the coverage in 2017.

The authors identified barriers to achieving better vaccine uptake in young children, including insufficient awareness of potential severity of disease, uncertainty regarding the safety and effectiveness of the influenza vaccine and concerns about increased numbers of childhood vaccines, as well as practical barriers to accessing immunisation service. Negative publicity about the influenza vaccine, particularly related to the 2010 temporary suspension of the program, was also identified as an issue.

The authors have made the following three recommendations for immunisation providers:

- offer ready access to annual influenza vaccination for all children aged 6 months to less than 5 years, ensuring that a second dose is received in the first year of vaccination;

- provide evidence-based information on the benefits of influenza vaccination, addressing any potential misconceptions; and
- ensure that all vaccinations given, including all influenza vaccines, are reported to the AIR.

A nationally consistent approach could potentially reduce confusion among providers and parents around the importance of influenza vaccination for children. If the influenza vaccine could be included on the NIP for all young children, this may also contribute to facilitating higher uptake, concluded Dr Beard and colleagues.

Influenza vaccination – important at all ages

Increased understanding of the disease burden caused by influenza across all age groups reinforces the importance of influenza vaccination at all ages from 6 months onwards, according to the authors of the perspective published in [Respiratory Medicine Today](#).

For infants too young to be vaccinated, vaccination of women during pregnancy is advantageous to both mothers and their babies. By keeping up to date with local influenza disease trends, vaccination recommendations, available vaccines and funding, immunisation providers can provide optimal care for patients and contribute to reducing the substantial burden of influenza each year, concluded authors Dr Li-Kim-Moy, Clinical Research Fellow at NCIRS, and Professor Macartney, Director, NCIRS.



**Protect *yourself*, your *family*
and your *community***

Beat the flu this season and get a **free** flu shot at your local participating **Aboriginal Medical Service**.



Available from 1 May, 2019.

Febrile seizures following vaccination not dangerous, new study reassures parents

New research from The University of Sydney and the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) has found the severity of febrile seizures following vaccination is no different from the severity of febrile seizures due to another cause, and that the majority of seizures are short-lived, self-resolving and don't require ongoing treatment.

Children living in Australia would have received 13 vaccinations by the time they reach two years of age. Reassuringly, febrile seizures following vaccination accounted only for 6 per cent of all first febrile seizure presentations to Australian children's hospitals.

Febrile seizures are the most common type of childhood seizures, affecting approximately 1 in 30 children under six years of age. They are triggered by a sudden rise in body temperature and are often associated with a febrile viral illness such as influenza. Febrile seizures are generally short and don't require ongoing treatment. Children can get a fever following a vaccination, which can also result in a febrile seizure.

Published last week in *Pediatrics*, this is the first prospective study to directly compare the differences in severity and outcomes between febrile seizures following vaccination and other febrile seizures.

"Febrile seizures are not known to cause long-lasting effects, but they are understandably frightening to parents and carers," said Dr Lucy Deng, lead author and PhD student from The University of Sydney and NCIRS.

Senior author Associate Professor Nicholas Wood from The University of Sydney and NCIRS said: "We hope this gives parents the confidence to continue vaccinating their children, especially now at a time when there have been cases of both measles and whooping cough and we prepare to enter into the flu season."

Adolescent meningococcal ACWY vaccine

From 1 April 2019, the vaccine will be provided free to:

- Year 10 students (aged 14–16 years) through school-based immunisation programs
- Adolescents aged 15 to 19 years, who missed receiving the vaccine at school, through their GP or primary care provider.



Refer to [Adolescent-meningococcal ACWY vaccine](#) for more information.

Communication resources

A range of communication resources have been developed and are hosted on the Childhood Immunisation Education Campaign website [resource page](#).

- Get the facts video – Protect your mob - '[Get the facts – It's really important to vaccinate on time](#)'
- Get the facts motion graphic - Protect your mob - '[Get the facts – getting your bub vaccinated is free and helps keep them, and everyone safe from diseases](#)'
- Get the facts brochure – Protect your mob - '[immunisation saves lives](#)'
- Get the facts poster – Protect your mob - '[immunisation protects all our kids](#)'

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I would like to familiarise myself and promote current immunisations activities and new initiatives within your area or seek an opportunity for me to attend relevant state, local community meeting to meet with you and get to know your work environment and where we all can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in regards to immunisation within my role.

Please flick me an email on all old or new things immunisations that you would like to share in Message Stick Newsletter.