

January 2009



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Closing the gap strategy - Aboriginal immunisation

From January 2009 the first part of a new Aboriginal immunisation strategy, will be implemented in maternity units which identifies Aboriginal parents and hence newborn Aboriginal infants.

In the months ahead the second part of the strategy of actively following up overdue Aboriginal children soon after their 2 month vaccines are due, will be implemented aiming at closing the gap in timely vaccination coverage rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children.

You can follow the progress of this Hunter New England Health Service initiative over the next year. The strategy will be evaluated quarterly from March 2009 via Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR - national register) quarterly vaccination coverage data.

Children starting pre-school or day-care

Pre-school and day-care facilities are great places to transfer disease from one child to another! Working parents do not need the added stresses of a sick child. Age-appropriate vaccination can significantly reduce the risk of vaccine-preventable diseases and every child commencing pre-school or day-care should be age-appropriately immunised at 2, 4, 6, 12 & 18 months and **especially 4 years**.

Happy Birthday 4 year-olds!

Four year-old boosters are often missed! It is important that these are given on time because 18-month booster of tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis vaccine is no longer part of the schedule. This fourth dose of vaccine, due at a child's 4th birthday, will ensure continued protection for the child (see below). This dose coincides with a new health check for 4 year-olds now required to be undertaken by GPs.

The national due & overdue rules used by the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) to determine whether a 4 year-old child is considered up-to-date with immunisation changed as of 1 January 2009. The change will render a 4 year-old overdue at 4 years and 1 month. This gives parents one month to have their 4 year-old vaccinated or lose financial benefits. NSW Health has advised that they have raised the issue with the Commonwealth and any complaints from parents or GPs should be directed to the Central Office of the Commonwealth Department of health & Ageing: 1800 020 103 OR Website: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-central.htm>

Health care students

This is the time of year when many students will ask for vaccination advice for clinical placement.

All vaccines for general protection should be up-to-date and then there are some that are mandatory if the student is not to be restricted in where they are placed for clinical experience.

Pre-vaccination serology not recommended - Pre-vaccination serology is generally not cost efficient and does not determine true protection following previous vaccination. Pre- varicella vaccine only, if no history of disease to discount sub-clinical infection. x2 doses varicella vaccine 1-2 months apart (script).

Hepatitis B vaccination in infancy is very effective but antibody titres will wane over time; this does not equate to waning protection. Only those undertaking exposure-prone procedures (nursing & medical students) need post-vaccination serology. If serology was not undertaken soon after hepatitis B vaccination, invariably antibody titres years after vaccination will be negative. Give one vaccine dose followed by serology in one month. If no previous vaccination, x3 doses at 0, 1 & 6 months via GP script. Do not use accelerated schedule. Can undertake clinical placement after 2nd vaccine dose. (GP script)

MMR - Do NOT screen; two documented doses of vaccine is required, otherwise give x2 doses a month apart. Can give free doses from your fridge.

Influenza vaccine will become available in March. (GP script)

dTpa – Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis. Boostrix or Adacel vaccines - They also come in combination with polio if an individual has not had a primary course (x3) as a child. This vaccine has only been available since 2004 so most will need a dose of this vaccine. (GP script)

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Website with other immunisation-related links: <http://www1.hnehealth.nsw.gov.au/hnep/immunisation/immunisation.htm>