

MEDIA RELEASE

Under-immunised Australian teens at risk of serious disease - new paper highlights

Australia's Immunisation Coalition releases recommendations to prioritise teen immunisation

- *New discussion paper released today identifies six key areas to build and strengthen the School Immunisation Program and maintain the chain of protection between infant and adult immunisation.¹*
- *Program must embrace current technologies in order to maximise teen immunisation uptake.¹*
- *Parents urged to prioritise their teen's immunisation in order to protect them from vaccine-preventable diseases.^{2,3}*

13 February 2017, Melbourne. Parents of teens starting high school have been asked to take the lead in prioritising their child's immunisation until the School Immunisation Program is strengthened.

The Immunisation Coalition today released its 'Time to Change' discussion paper setting out recommendations in six key areas to strengthen the School Immunisation Program.¹

Professor Paul Van Buynder, Chairman of the Immunisation Coalition, said parents need to make sure they are prioritising their young teens' immunisation to protect their health later in life.

"Some parents believe that by doing nothing they are keeping their child safe, however the opposite is true," Professor Van Buynder said. "It is vital for parents to understand and recognise the benefits of teen vaccination, as the School Immunisation Program plays a critical role in protection against serious and widespread disease, including some forms of cancer.

"We are urging all parents of teens starting high school to prioritise their child's immunisation and get informed by reading reliable information provided through the school or their healthcare professional about immunisation and the vaccines."

It's critical for parents to find the immunisation consent form sent home, sign and return it to the school. If a child misses a vaccination for whatever reason parents can also take them to their GP to catch up on the required doses.⁴

"By making sure your child is immunised, you are joining the majority of parents who have helped to not only protect their child but also Australia," he said.

A roundtable of experts in immunisation, schools and students were brought together to look at ways in which the program could be improved to close the gap in information flow between schools and GPs.

Some of the key recommendations from the discussion paper include:

- Investigating opportunities for the use of new technologies to play a bigger role in the program. For example, a standardised online immunisation consent form, and national adoption of text message reminders from the local school to parents.¹
- Providing clear and relevant information from scientific experts to parents earlier so any misconceptions can be addressed before the immunisation consent forms are sent out for signing.¹
- An annual awareness campaign to raise the profile of the School Immunisation Program.¹

Matthew Roussis, NSW Youth Parliament Governor elect, one of the roundtable participants, said more could be done to educate parents and teens on the importance of education and awareness.

“Knowledge is power and in order to combat the misconceptions about vaccinations, parents and teens need to know about how vaccines work, what they do, and have the support available to them to help address any concerns that they may have,” Mr Roussis said.

The Immunisation Coalition’s discussion paper highlighted six key areas that could be built on to strengthen the School Immunisation Program:¹

1. **Address information gaps** so parents receive timely and relevant advice from scientific and healthcare experts.
2. **Simplify the consent process** and facilitate a broader discussion about a national online consent process.
3. **Connect schools and general practice** to close gaps in reporting by integrating vaccination information from the School Immunisation Program into the Australian Immunisation Program.
4. **Establish a GP catch-up alert system** to assist GPs to ensure teen patients are up to date on their vaccinations.
5. **Implement supporting activities and communicate progress** on an annual basis to make sure that parents of children going into high school are aware of the immunisation program and their responsibility.
6. **Allocate appropriate resourcing** to ensure the School Immunisation Program is fit for the future.

“The School Immunisation Program has played an integral role in helping to protect Australians from a multitude of serious preventable diseases. We want to ensure that, as a country, we build on its success and strengthen the program to create a lasting service to keep all Australians healthy,” said Professor Van Buynder.

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About the Immunisation Coalition

The Immunisation Coalition is a not for profit advocacy group with a mission to create awareness regarding the importance of immunisation. Immunisation still provides the best protection against infectious diseases. We work with consumers, health professionals and organisations with an interest in immunisation and government health agencies, ensuring that the information provided to consumers through our website and other communication channels is current, easily understood and scientifically informed.

For more information, visit: www.immunisationcoalition.org.au

About the Panel

Members on the panel were invited to participate in a roundtable to look what needed to happen to ensure a lasting world class School Immunisation Program. The panel convened on Thursday 8 December and included views from:

- Professor Paul Van Buynder - Chairman of the Immunisation Coalition and Public Health physician with the Gold Coast Health Service.
- Professor Robert Booy - University of Sydney and Immunisation Coalition Board Member.
- Dr Leanne Jones – GP in Launceston, parent and Immunisation Coalition Board Member.
- Mr Kim Sampson – CEO, Immunisation Coalition.
- Mr Rob Nairn – Executive Director – Australian Secondary Principals Association.
- Mr Matthew Roussis – NSW Youth Parliament Youth Governor elect.

References

1. Immunisation Coalition. 2017. *School based immunisation in Australia: Time to Change*.
2. Department of Health. 2016. National Immunisation Program Schedule.
3. Ward K et al. 2013. A history of Adolescent school-based vaccination in Australia. *CDI*;17(2):E168–74
4. Cancer Council Australia. What if my child misses out? Available online: <http://www.hpvvaccine.org.au/parents/what-if-my-child-misses-a-dose.aspx> (Last accessed 31 Jan 2017)