



## Fact Sheet: World Immunisation Week

### *Low vaccinations rates among older Australians spark call for action this World Immunisation Week*

Immunisation remains the most effective way to stop the spread of harmful diseases.<sup>1</sup> It not only protects individuals from serious diseases, but also dramatically reduces transmission in the community.<sup>2</sup>

Australia has demonstrated strong national support and uptake of childhood immunisation thanks to our National Immunisation Program.<sup>2</sup> Adult immunisation rates, however, remain far below optimal levels.<sup>3,4</sup>

### **The Immunisation Coalition supports World Immunisation Week**

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In support of the World Health Organization's *World Immunisation Week* campaign "Close the immunisation Gap: Immunisation for all throughout life"<sup>5</sup> (24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2017), the Immunisation Coalition is urging older Aussies to check their vaccination status.

Using the hashtags **#VaccinesWork** and **#ImmunisationWeek**, the Immunisation Coalition (IC) is spreading the word via social media.

#### ***Vaccination is important to staying healthy throughout life***

- Australians are diligent with children's vaccinations as we recognise they are vulnerable to infection, however at the other end of the age spectrum we seem to be a little more relaxed.<sup>2,3,4</sup>
- Ageing makes us vulnerable to infection so keeping up to date with recommended vaccinations as we get older is critical.
- When you skip vaccines, you leave yourself vulnerable to illnesses such as shingles, pneumococcal disease, influenza, and other diseases.

#### ***Vaccination is as important as your overall lifestyle, diet and exercise***

- Regardless of how healthy and fit you feel, if you are aged 60 and over, you are at increased risk of serious, yet potentially preventable illnesses. Vaccination is one of the most effective and safest preventive care measures available.

#### ***The impact of vaccine preventable diseases on the Australian community is significant***

- Pneumonia and influenza account for more than 2,800 deaths per year, on average.<sup>7</sup>
- Around 120,000 cases of shingles are estimated to occur in people aged over 60 annually and cases have increased by more than 50 per cent in recent years.<sup>8</sup>

**The Australian Immunisation Handbook recommends the following immunisations for healthy, older, non-indigenous Australians, specifically based on their age-related risk:<sup>\*6</sup>**

- Influenza (flu) – from age 65
- Pneumococcal – from age 65
- Herpes zoster (shingles) – from age 60

*\* For recommendations regarding immunisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other groups with special vaccination requirements, please refer to the Australian Immunisation Handbook.*



## **New research reveals low vaccination rates among older Aussies**

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An online survey among 1,000 Australians aged 60 years and over from cities and regional areas around Australia, was conducted by Galaxy Research in February 2016. Some of the key findings include:<sup>9</sup>

### ***More than one in four older Australians have not received the Government recommended vaccines for their age – influenza, shingles and pneumococcal pneumonia<sup>9</sup>***

- While 79% of those aged between 65-69 years have been vaccinated against flu, only 44% have been vaccinated against pneumococcal pneumonia, and only 4% have been vaccinated against shingles.<sup>9</sup>
- Despite being at higher risk of all three illnesses as we age, only 17% believe they are at high risk of the flu, only 9% believe they are at high risk of pneumococcal pneumonia, and a mere 7% believe they are at high risk of shingles.<sup>9</sup>
- 64% of older Australians focus on vaccinations when it comes to protecting their health.<sup>9</sup>
- Those who were older were more focused on vaccination than those closest to retirement age, with 80% of Australians aged 75 years and older focusing on vaccinations vs 47% of those aged 60-64 years.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Remaining independent is the main reason Aussies over 60 are looking after their health<sup>9</sup>***

- Maintaining independence (90%) is the key reason for taking steps to protect health, followed by continuing to enjoy leisure and social activities (87%) and preventing serious illness (84%).<sup>9</sup>
- Healthy eating (86%) and regular GP checks (81%) are the main ways in which older Australians are choosing to protect their health.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Flu season and travelling are the key triggers for considering vaccination***

- Vaccination becomes most top of mind when it is flu season (72%) or when older Australians are planning to travel (58%).<sup>9</sup>
- 54% of respondents will consider the need for vaccination if their doctor raises the topic.<sup>9</sup>

**To join us in supporting World Immunisation Week, follow the Immunisation Coalition online:**



@immunisationgap



facebook.com/immunisationcoalition

**References:** **1)** Commonwealth of Australia. 2015. Immunise Australia Program. About Immunisation – Why Immunise? [Online] Available at: <http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/why-immunise>, last accessed, 1 March 2016. **2)** Commonwealth of Australia. Immunise Australia Program. About Immunisation – Introduction. [Online] Available at: <http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/introduction-ai>, last accessed, 1 March 2016. **3)** Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011. 2009 Adult Vaccination Survey: summary results. Cat. no. PHE 135. Canberra: AIHW. [Online] Available at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=10737418286>, last accessed, 1 March 2016. **4)** Australian Government Department of Health. National Immunisation Strategy for Australia 2013-2018. Nov 2013. **5)** World Health Organisation. Closing the immunisation gap: Immunization For All Throughout Life. World Immunization Week 2016. Campaign toolkit. [Online] Available at: <http://www.who.int/campaigns/immunization-week/2016/toolkit-en.pdf?ua=1>, last accessed 8 April 2016. **6)** National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC.) 2015. Australian Immunisation Handbook – 10th Edition. [Online] Available at: <http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/Handbook10-home>, last accessed, 1 March 2016 **7)** Australia Bureau of Statistics. 2016 Causes of Deaths in Australia 2014. [Online] Available at: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3303.0>, last accessed 21 April 2016. **8)** MacIntyre R et al. 2015. Increasing trends of Herpes Zoster in Australia. PLoS ONE 10(4): e0125025. Doi:10.1371/journal.phone.0125025. **9)** Galaxy Research. 2016. n=1002, online survey (commissioned by Seqirus). Australian Adult Immunisation Study. Seqirus data on file