

Media Release



20 January 2010

Low Immunisation Figures Putting Everyone at Risk of Preventable Diseases

Rapidly declining immunisation rates in Australia are putting communities at risk of pertussis (whooping cough), measles, mumps, rubella and swine flu, especially as the school year is about to get under way, says Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) Chair Dr Emil Djakic.

"Immunisation rates for four year olds have reduced to about 83 percent – a seven year low, and they are likely to continue to drop," Dr Djakic said.

Australia aims to have an immunisation rate of 90 percent or above, a good coverage rate by international standards. The vaccinations protect children from diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, mumps and rubella.

"The best defence against these illnesses is vaccination. Last year children presented to general practices with illnesses that could have been prevented," said Dr Djakic. The risk to community is high, a pertussis epidemic on the east coast of the country last year led to the death of one child and severe illness for many more.

Children not vaccinated also pose a severe threat of passing on the illness to pregnant women, older or obese people and Indigenous Australians, with potentially tragic consequences. "These illnesses are often much worse for adults, and adults with a chronic condition are at a high risk of serious complications," Dr Djakic said.

Influenza H1N1 (swine flu) is still a concern for Australia, with the return to school likely to see a resurgence in those young people affected, unless vaccinated. Dr Djakic strongly encouraged all parents of children starting school this year to have their four year old vaccination completed before school begins.

Wheatbelt GP Network Chairman, Dr Duncan Steed reports that "The Wheatbelt region has an immunisation coverage rate of 89% and parents should be commended for the rate being above the Australian average. However, the rate remains below the target of 90%, and means that a notable percentage of children aren't being fully immunised."



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Wheatbelt GP Network is an initiative of the Central Wheatbelt Division of General Practice Inc (ABN 73 639 952 959)



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Wheatbelt
GP Network



Building healthy communities through General Practice.

Dr Steed reminds Wheatbelt residents that your local GP is available to complete a 4-year-old health check, which includes a comprehensive health assessment and immunisation. The health check and immunisation is usually bulk-billed to Medicare so there will be no out-of-pocket expense for you. Make sure you tell the practice receptionist the reason for your visit so a longer appointment can be booked.

"GPs can answer all your immunisation questions, concerns with development, diet, sleep and much more. The 4-year-old health check provides the ideal opportunity to discuss such concerns or simply take advantage of the opportunity for a full check-up at no cost." said Dr Steed.

Help protect all members of your family and community by ensuring all your children have received their vaccinations on time. For questions about the Government's immunisation schedule, don't hesitate in contacting your local General Practice or Community Health Nurse.

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For media inquiries please phone Trisha Ellis on (08) 9621 1530 or email memberservices@wheatbelt.com.au.



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