

29 April 2007

Children's vaccination 'still vitally important'

Queensland parents shouldn't become complacent about ensuring their children are immunised against infectious diseases, says Queensland Health.

Communicable Diseases Director, Dr Christine Selvey said *World Immunisation Day* on Sunday (29 April) offers a timely opportunity to encourage parents to make sure their children's immunisations are up-to-date.

"Queenslanders enjoy a high level of protection from childhood diseases and it's important that we keep it that way," Dr Selvey said.

"Although around nine out of 10 Queensland children currently receive all their immunisations, a small minority of parents hold back from organising this protection."

Dr Selvey said full immunisation by the age of six provided protection against whooping cough, measles, mumps, rubella, polio, diphtheria and tetanus, meningococcal C, Haemophilus influenzae type B, hepatitis B, pneumococcal disease and varicella (chickenpox) as children got older and became adults.

"While our vaccination rates are generally high, this doesn't mean that vaccine preventable diseases no longer occur in our community," she said.

"We are still receiving notifications of whooping cough, which is a serious disease. The pre-school immunisations are very important for protecting children during their school years, and possibly also protecting their younger, more vulnerable siblings."

Dr Selvey said that that by their first birthday, children should be vaccinated against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) disease.

"At 12 months, it is recommended that children are immunised against measles, mumps and rubella, and meningococcal C; and at 18 months varicella (chickenpox) vaccination is administered. At four years, children should receive booster shots against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, and polio, and measles, mumps and rubella."

Dr Selvey said Queensland's new school-based program will mean that adolescents will now be vaccinated against hepatitis B (two doses), chickenpox, diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough. Female students in Years 10, 11 and 12 with parental approval will receive the HPV vaccine, Gardasil, to protect them against cervical cancer.

Interstate comparisons from the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register show the number of Queensland children immunised is similar to the national average.

Dr Selvey said a snapshot of vaccination in Queensland shows that in December last year, 90.8 per cent of 12 month old children and 91.3 per cent of two year old children had been fully vaccinated.

Although the proportion of six year old children who were fully vaccinated was slightly lower at 87.19 per cent, this still represented a big improvement from the comparative 2005 figure of 81.9 per cent.

Immunisation is available from GPs, community agencies and some council clinics.

Media inquiries: David Brewtnall – 3376 2253 before 12pm