



MEDICAL MEDIA RELEASE

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GPs key to help reduce the risk of vaccine-preventable disease for teens

- *New paper from the Immunisation Coalition highlights the role of GPs in supporting the teen school immunisation program¹*
- *National coverage for HPV vaccination uptake not reaching 80% target, meaning under-immunised teens are at risk of vaccine preventable diseases^{2,3,4,5,6}*
- *Immunisation Coalition calls on GPs to take a pro-active role in 2017 by asking about teen vaccination status, offering catch-ups and counselling parents on the importance of vaccination*

13 February 2017, Melbourne. GPs are being called upon to help improve protection for Australian teens by making sure teens are up to date on their vaccinations according to new recommendations published today in a paper from the Immunisation Coalition.¹

The new 'Time to Change' discussion paper sets out recommendations in six key areas in order to strengthen the School Immunisation Program.^{1,7}

Included in the Coalition's paper are a number of recommendations such as connecting schools with general practice to make it easier for parents and GPs to understand a child's immunisation status and if catch-ups are required, and the establishment of a GP catch-up alert system to prompt parents to check teens' immunisation status.¹

Professor Paul Van Buynder, President of the Immunisation Coalition, says GPs are uniquely placed in the community to overcome some of the key barriers to vaccination uptake among this age group, including addressing information gaps for those parents who may harbour concerns or lack understanding regarding the efficacy and safety profiles of the vaccines available through the program.⁸

"GPs are some of the most trusted people in the community and continue to play a vital role in supporting parental decisions around immunisation well beyond a child's infant years. They are especially well placed to educate parents on the benefits of immunisation and to check that teens are up to date with their vaccinations," said Professor Van Buynder.

The national coverage target for HPV vaccination is 80%, but to achieve this all three doses must be completed.^{4,5,6} The latest HPV registry report shows that average third-dose coverage across both genders drops to 71%.^{2,3} Boys especially are falling through the gaps, with a 77% uptake for dose one and falling all the way to 66% by dose three.³

Disconnects in reporting mechanisms make in-practice vaccination reporting challenging.⁹ These challenges are reflected in the under-notification of GP doses in general practice, with one New South Wales research study showing only 3% of GPs report to the National HPV Vaccination Program Register.¹⁰



Professor Van Buynder says whilst changes are underway, the Immunisation Coalition is calling on GPs to take an active role in HPV vaccination of teens in 2017, by being aware of the school program schedule, actively asking parents of teens about their vaccination status and offering catch up doses if needed to ensure all teen patients are protected from infectious disease.

“One of the key recommendations in our paper is to strengthen the opportunity for catch-up doses through GPs,” Professor Van Buynder said. “Whilst the school program will always be the best way for teens to receive immunisations, there will always be circumstances where some children miss out, such as being sick on vaccination day. In many states systems do not allow for return school visits to catch these children up.”

“This is where a GP catch-up alert system would be of benefit, to assist GPs in ensuring teen patients are up to date on their HPV vaccines. If they don’t get all three doses, they’re simply not protected.”

Recent studies show GPs play a critical role in filling the gaps of teen immunisation, with 45% of teens who miss their dose at school completing their full HPV vaccination schedule via their GP.¹⁰ One of the main reason teens did not successfully complete vaccination was a lack of awareness of the opportunity to catch-up at a GP (32%).¹⁰

Ends

Media release issued by SenateSHJ on behalf of the Immunisation Coalition

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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 Discussion Paper

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

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.

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 - Head of the Clinical Research team at the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) 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

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