Prof Michael Kidd

Chief Medical Officer, Department of Health & Aged Care

IMMUNISATION COALITION

Vaccine hesitancy and misinformation / disinformation effect on vaccination rates

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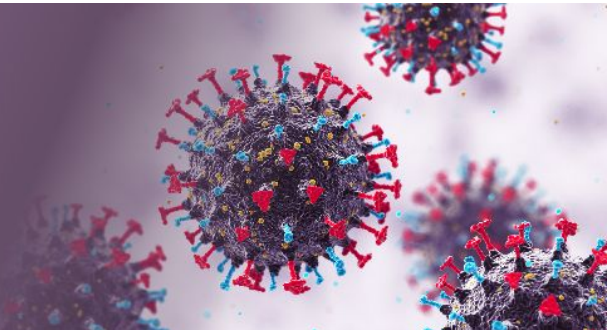

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Vaccine hesitancy and misinformation

The effect on Australia's vaccination rates

Professor Michael Kidd AO

Chief Medical Officer

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Immunisation in Australia

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Since the introduction of vaccination for children in Australia in 1932, deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases have fallen by **99%**.

The Australian Government through the **National Immunisation Program** invests more than $1 billion to supply 31 free vaccines for **18 vaccine-preventable diseases** to protect eligible people from birth to older age.

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Vaccine safety and monitoring

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Pre-market assessment

In Australia, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) rigorously assesses all vaccines to ensure they meet our high standards for safety, quality and efficacy before they are approved for use. TGA also conduct a batch release assessment process for every batch of vaccine supplied in Australia.

Post-market assessment and enforcement of standards

Even after vaccines are supplied on the market, their safety continues to be monitored. This includes passive surveillance by the TGA and active surveillance through AusVaxSafety, administered by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance.

Licensing of Australian manufacturers and compliance of overseas manufacturers

The TGA also regulates vaccines through licensing of Australian manufacturers and ensuring that overseas vaccine manufacturers are compliant with the same standards as their Australian counterparts.

Ongoing decline in vaccination rates

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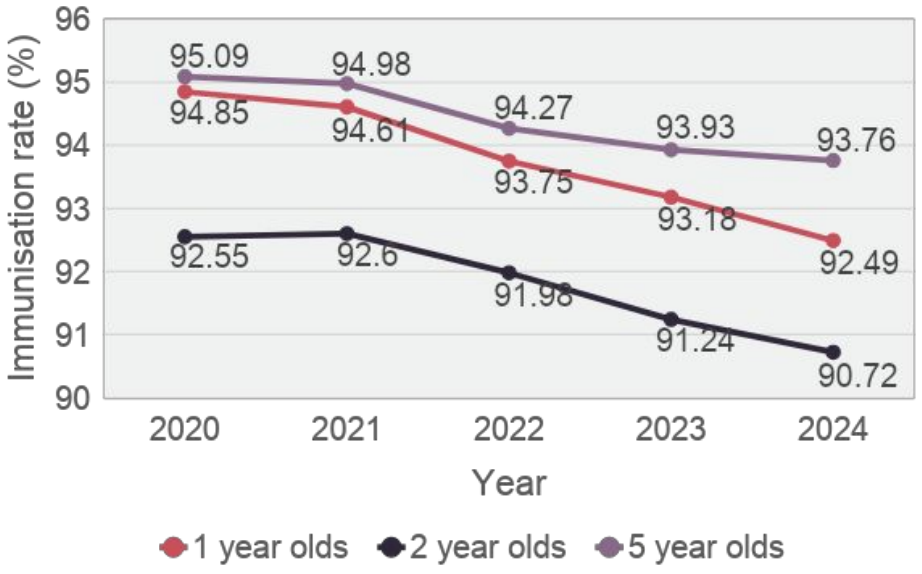
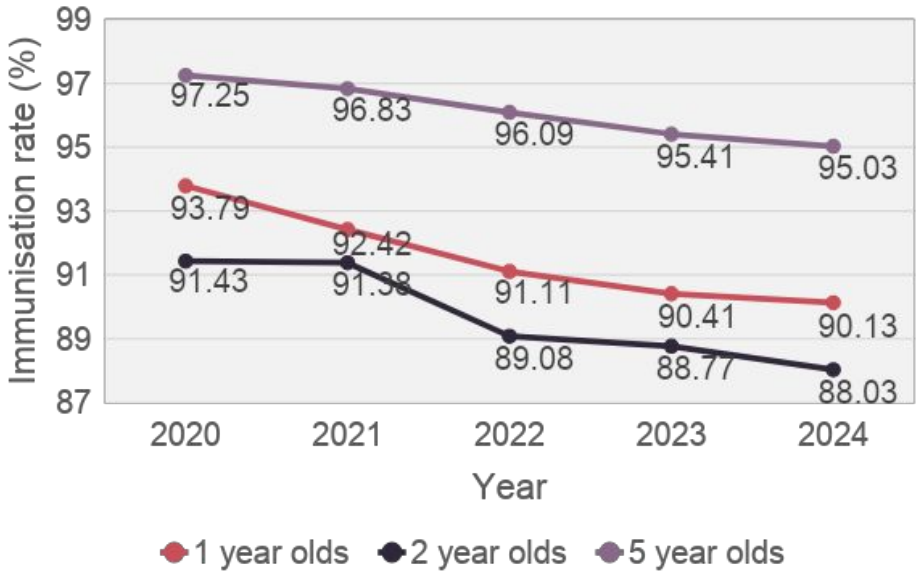
Since 2020, Australia's vaccination rates have steadily declined and are currently below the 95% coverage target across most cohorts and for most vaccines.

Historical coverage data for all children



Historical coverage for First Nations children



Factors contributing to declining vaccination rates

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Two main factors are driving vaccination decline:

- **Access barriers** include practical difficulties with accessing immunisation services – making an appointment, cost, distance, transportation, language barriers.

- **Acceptance barriers** include thinking and feeling and social influence barriers – loss of trust and low confidence in vaccines leading to vaccine hesitancy and refusal.

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Vaccine hesitancy and misinformation

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Vaccine hesitancy refers to delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite their availability.

Vaccine hesitancy and refusal is complex and driven by several factors, including **misinformation and disinformation** around vaccines and immunisation, in Australia and globally.

The **World Health Organization** named vaccine hesitancy as one of the top 10 threats to global health in 2019.

Mis- and disinformation leads the top short-term global risk in the annual **World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2025.**

The **COVID-19 Response Inquiry Report** identified trust as a key priority of government. It recommended the development of a national strategy to rebuild community trust in vaccines and improve vaccination rates.

Misinformation and disinformation

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Misinformation: the spread of false information **without the intent** to mislead. Those who share the misinformation may believe it is true, useful or interesting, and have no malicious intent towards the recipients they are sharing it with.

Disinformation: the spread of manipulated information **with full knowledge** of it being false as part of an intention to deceive and cause harm.

Motivations may include:

- personal/monetary gain
- ideological, religious, political reasons
- social agenda (such as more supporters, followers)

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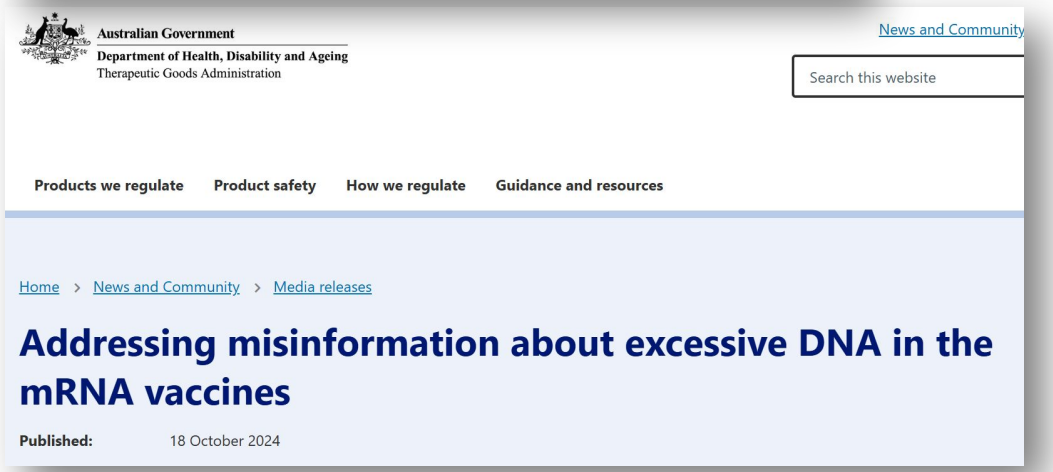
Examples of misinformation and disinformation



Strategies to address declining vaccination rates

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Misinformation and its rapid spread online, particularly through social media, is a challenge for the Government and health professionals.

Our goal is to ensure people receive accurate, evidence-based information while maintaining confidence in Australia's immunisation efforts.

Other actions to address declining vaccination rates

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Immunisation campaigns – to provide balanced, impartial and credible information from trustworthy sources through multiple pathways to enable people to make informed decisions about vaccination.

Sustainability review – to quantify the burden of vaccine-preventable diseases to understand their economic impact, and direct and indirect health benefits to support the development of an economic model that will inform future funding decisions.

Engaging with Chief Scientist and National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) – to conduct a project looking at *'Information resilience: What makes individuals and populations susceptible to believing misinformation and disinformation – and what makes them resilient?'* .

Partnering with the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) – to fund the Vaccine Insights Report to further understand the reasons behind vaccine hesitancy and develop the Sharing Knowledge About Information (SKAI) website.

Future actions to address declining vaccination rates

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- **Potential establishment of a 'misinformation coalition'** – partnering with research institutions, universities, industry to horizon scan for threats and provide expert advice to government on key science, trust and engagement issues.

- **More targeted resources** – to protect and help individuals identify reliable information and point them to sources containing the latest official and evidence-based facts and recommendations.

- **Continue engaging with communities** – to understand sources of misinformation and identify trusted voices/leaders in areas where there is low vaccine uptake.

- The new **National Immunisation Strategy 2025–2030** – highlights building trust as a priority to increase vaccine uptake.

In conclusion…

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- Vaccines are the most powerful tool we have to protect people against infectious diseases.
- The World Health Organization found vaccines have saved an estimated 154 million lives worldwide in the past 50 years from 14 different diseases.
- The Government are working hard to fight rising vaccine hesitancy, but we cannot do it alone.
- It’s only by working together towards a common goal and with a consistent message that we will be able to address rising hesitancy and turn declining vaccination rates around.