



THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
Minister for Health and Ageing

THE HON JENNY MACKLIN MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs

MEDIA RELEASE

25 November 2011

Stronger Immunisation Incentives

The Gillard Government will reform Australia's childhood immunisation arrangements with the aim of increasing the immunisation rates of Australian children over time.

Immunisation remains the safest and most effective way for parents to protect their children from disease. In Australia, currently about 9 in 10 children are immunised. But, currently 8 per cent of one year olds, 7 per cent of two year olds, and 11 per cent of five year olds are not immunised – which is a real risk to their health and to the health of other children.

The Gillard Government will take the following actions:

- Families will now need to have their children fully immunised to receive the \$726 Family Tax Benefit Part A end-of-year supplement.
- A new immunisation check will be introduced for one year olds to supplement the existing immunisation checks at two and five years of age.
- This means that over the three immunisation check points, families will have an incentive of more than \$2,100 to ensure their child is fully immunised.
- Children will for the first time be required to receive vaccines for meningococcal C, pneumococcal and varicella (chicken pox).
- A combination vaccine will replace individual doses of vaccine for measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (chicken pox) – which means children will be immunised against measles, mumps and rubella earlier, at 18 months instead of the current four years of age.

In addition, the Government is launching a campaign to advise parents and healthcare providers on how to protect babies from whooping cough.

Stronger incentives to get children immunised

From 1 July 2012, families will need to have their children fully immunised to receive the Family Tax Benefit Part A end-of-year supplement.

The supplement, worth \$726 per child each year, will now only be paid once a child is fully immunised at one, two and five years of age.

These new requirements will be implemented at a new immunisation check point at one year of age, along with the existing check points at two and five years of age.

This means that over the three immunisation check points of one, two and five years old, families will now have an incentive of more than \$2,100 to ensure their children are fully immunised.

Families are already required to have their child fully immunised to receive Child Care Benefit and the Child Care Rebate.

Most families get their kids immunised – and this won't make a difference to them. But for those families that don't, this provides a significant incentive.

The new arrangements will replace the Maternity Immunisation Allowance, which currently provides a modest payment of \$129 for families who meet immunisation requirements when their child is two and five years old. This means that from 1 July 2012 the Allowance will no longer be paid.

This builds on the Government's previous reforms using family payments to help drive better outcomes for families and children, including:

- new requirements for families on income support to make sure children get a pre-school health check;
- new 'earn or learn' requirements; and
- increasing family payments for teenagers if they stay in school.

Existing exemptions will continue to be available for people who register as conscientious objectors to immunisation.

Extra vaccinations required

From 1 July 2013, children will also be required to receive vaccines for meningococcal C, pneumococcal and varicella (chicken pox) to be assessed as fully immunised. The Government expects that these requirements, which have been recommended by immunisation experts, will help lift the vaccination rates for each of these diseases.

New combination vaccine added to the National Immunisation Program

From 1 July 2013, the combination vaccine Priorix-Tetra will be added to the National Immunisation Program. This will replace individual doses of the MMR vaccine (for measles, mumps and rubella) and the varicella vaccine (for chicken pox) at a cost of \$16 million over four years.

The new combination vaccine will make it easier for parents to immunise their children against these four different diseases, and will bring forward immunisation for measles, mumps and rubella to the earlier age of 18 months instead of the current four years of age.

That means kids will be immunised for measles, mumps and rubella two and a half years earlier than they are now and with one less injection overall.

Campaign to protect babies from whooping cough

The Minister for Health and Ageing is also announcing today a new campaign to advise parents and healthcare providers on what they can do to protect babies from whooping cough (pertussis). All parents of newborns will receive letters providing information on immunising against whooping cough, and how to identify the disease and prevent it spreading.

Minister for Health and Ageing Nicola Roxon said these reforms build on the Gillard Government's commitment to ensure that Australian children get the very best start to life.

"Parents want to give their kids the best start in life. We know that immunisation is fundamental to a child's lifelong health and that's why we want to make sure that children are immunised at the right time," Minister Roxon said.

"We want to see all Australian kids growing up healthy, and immunisation is essential to that."

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, said these reforms would provide stronger incentives for families to get their young children immunised, at a lower overall cost to taxpayers...

"This is good for children, good for families and good for the economy," Minister Macklin said.

"We are taking a stronger approach to make sure more little children are getting all their recommended vaccinations."

These changes will help improve immunisation outcomes and deliver savings of \$209.1 million over four years.

**For all media inquiries, please contact:
Minister Roxon's Office on 02 6277 7220
Minister Macklin's Office on 0417 297 157**