



**Australian Government**

**Department of Health and Aged Care**

**Chief Medical Officer**

### **Support for routine childhood immunisation**

Dear Colleague

I am writing to seek your support to maintain and encourage high rates of routine childhood immunisation among your patients.

Firstly, I wish to express my gratitude and acknowledge the significant and vital role that frontline health professionals have played in preparing for and responding to public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the health system is still facing significant challenges in providing essential health services and returning to a more business-as-usual footing, primary care providers have demonstrated their dedication and perseverance by prioritising vaccination for children, resulting in relatively high routine vaccination rates among children in Australia during the pandemic.

However, there is cause for concern as delayed or missed childhood vaccination has become a pressing problem globally, with some of the largest declines in rates seen for decades. Unfortunately, Australia has also been affected by this issue, with concerning downward trends observed in childhood immunisation coverage rates over the past two years, particularly for First Nations children.

The Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) research has shown that parents are now much more likely to hold negative perceptions towards childhood immunisation and have heightened interest and concerns relating to vaccines. Due to the focus on COVID-19, there has been reduced awareness about the importance of childhood vaccination.

The department is planning to undertake promotional activity from April 2023, reminding parents of the importance of childhood immunisation and encouraging timely completion of the childhood vaccination schedule. For parents who have concerns, we encourage them to seek information from trustworthy sources to support their decisions. In doing so, we expect more parents may seek your advice.

Research has shown that your recommendations and advice play a crucial role in parents' decisions about childhood vaccination. To support you in this role, I want to make you aware of information that may be useful to use in your practice to identify overdue children, raise awareness about the importance of immunisation, and counter misinformation.

## Reports from the Australian Immunisation Register

Reports from the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) can be accessed to assist in identifying children at your practice who are missing scheduled vaccines at a certain age (AIR010A report). Reports covering due and overdue children by locality and by vaccination provider (AIR011A and AIR011B) are also available.

I encourage you to use these reports to track the vaccination status of children, implement reminder and recall systems, and consider opportunities to deliver more accessible and flexible vaccination services for harder to reach children.

Further information about these AIR reports can be accessed from the Services Australia website [Australian Immunisation Register for health professionals - Services Australia](#).

## Conversation approaches to support childhood immunisation

The Sharing Knowledge About Immunisation (SKAI) communication support tools are designed to aid and inspire great conversations about immunisation with pregnant women, parents of young children, and families. They were developed by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance, in partnership with the University of Sydney and other collaborators.

- The Health Professional tools (available through [www.skai.org.au](http://www.skai.org.au)) are designed to help you meet the needs of all parents, whether they are ready to vaccinate, have questions, or intend to decline vaccination altogether.
- The Parents' website ([talkingaboutimmunisation.org.au](http://talkingaboutimmunisation.org.au)) provides information and resources to support parents in making vaccination decisions for their family.

## Resources for parents

From April, a range of further resources will become available on the department's childhood immunisation campaign website at: [www.health.gov.au/childhoodimmunisation](http://www.health.gov.au/childhoodimmunisation) to promote childhood vaccinations and help answer common questions parents may have about vaccination.

I urge you to make use of these valuable tools and resources and share them with your colleagues, so that we can work together to protect children from preventable diseases.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

Yours sincerely



Professor Paul Kelly  
Chief Medical Officer  
3 March 2023