Welcome to the National Indigenous Immunisation message stick (NIIMS) May 2013

A vaccine preventable diseases newsletter for health services

What’s new in Indigenous immunisation nationally?

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Immunisation Network (NATSIIN)

The NATSIIN has evolved from a network that consisted of members from several Aboriginal Community Controlled Medical Services and state affiliates only, to now shift to include the government and private sectors. This shift provides the opportunity to maintain the NATSIIN process, while broadening the participation of organisations outside the community controlled sector. The role of the NATSIIN is to provide policy and program advice to the National Immunisation Committee (NIC) on matters related to the immunisation of Indigenous people nationally.

Extension of the National Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination Program to include young men

The National HPV Vaccination Program is a free school-based program to protect young men and women against a range of cancers and disease caused by Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Indigenous young people and their families are a major focus of this program.

From 2013, the current school-based program for young women will be extended to offer HPV vaccination free to young men aged 12-13 years. Young men aged 14-15 years will also be able to get the vaccine during 2013 and 2014.

The program involves a three dose schedule, delivered at 0, 2 and 6 months. All eligible boys and girls will get the vaccination at school or at community clinics. **Parent and/or guardians need to give their consent for their child to have the HPV vaccine.**

Seasonal Influenza Vaccine

Influenza can be prevented. From 15 March 2013, free flu vaccination will be available to all Indigenous people aged 15 years and over, all pregnant women, and all people from six months of age with existing medical conditions at risk of complications from influenza.

The spread of the flu can be reduced through good hygiene practices such as washing hands and covering the mouth and nose, especially around young children and those at risk of complications from the flu.

Indigenous health services and health workers will receive brochures to discuss the flu vaccine with their clients and posters to promote the flu shot.

For further information please visit the Immunise Australia website www.immunise.health.gov.au or phone 1800 671 811.

New Combination Measles, Mumps, Rubella and Varicella Vaccine

From 1 July 2013 a combined measles, mumps, rubella, varicella (MMRV) vaccine for children aged 18 months will be added to the National Immunisation Program (NIP).

The combined MMRV vaccine will replace the monovalent varicella vaccine (for chickenpox) currently given at 18 months and replaces the second dose of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) currently scheduled for 4 year olds. This will reduce by one the total number of injections currently provided as part of the NIP. Children who have already received their 18 month old varicella vaccine (for chickenpox) will still be immunised for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) at 4 years of age.

Linking of immunisation to Family Tax Benefit Part A Supplement

From 1 July 2012, parents need to have had their children ‘fully immunised’ during the financial years that each child turns one, two and five years of age to receive the FTB Part A supplement.

From 1 July 2013, the definition of ‘fully immunised’ will be expanded to include the meningococcal C, pneumococcal conjugate and varicella vaccines, which are currently listed on the National Immunisation Program Schedule but have not previously been an eligibility requirement for Family Tax Benefit payments. Data on the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) will be used to assess children’s immunisation status, so it is important that immunisation providers ensure the child’s ACIR record is up to date to facilitate payment for families.

For further information please visit the Immunise Australia website www.immunise.health.gov.au or phone 1800 671 811.

The Australian Immunisation Handbook provides evidence-based clinical practice guidelines for health professionals on the safe and effective use of all vaccines in Australia.

The 10th edition of the Handbook was approved by the NHMRC CEO on 25 January 2013, under Section 14A of the National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992. It was launched on the 28th March 2013 and is available online at the link below. Hard copies can also be ordered through the website.


Aboriginal Immunisation Promotion in South Australia

“Help me stay strong” – ensuring timely immunisations

South Australia Health has developed a promotional strategy that aims to increase awareness about the need for complete and timely immunisations for Aboriginal children, especially at 2, 4 and 6 months of age but relevant to all Aboriginal children up to 4 years of age.

The campaign targets parents, caregivers and family members of Aboriginal children with the key message of ‘Help Me Stay Strong’. This message is supported with a brochure and posters containing information on why immunisation in early childhood is so important for Aboriginal children and where parents and carers can access immunisation services and further information. To learn more go to the link below.
Research activity

Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) in Population Health Research

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander vaccination needs stream of the CRE will focus on methods to improve Indigenous identifiers, means to monitor program effectiveness, methods to better target vaccination programs and models of delivering immunisation programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and research into improving vaccine delivery, coverage and timeliness. Before any new research was embarked on The National Aboriginal and Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and their Affiliates were invited to a CRE IMMUNISATION RESEARCH ROUNDTABLE to identify areas of need.

A copy of the CRE IMMUNISATION RESEARCH ROUNDTABLE REPORT shall be added to the CRE website below as soon as it has been endorsed by NACCHO.


Publications of interest

The end of the Australia antigen? An ecological study of the impact of universal newborn hepatitis B vaccination two decades on.

A universal newborn hepatitis B (HBV) vaccination program was introduced in the Northern Territory of Australia in 1990, followed by a school-based catch-up program. We evaluated the prevalence of hepatitis B infection in birthing women up to 20 years after vaccination and compared this to women born before the programs commenced.

The Abstract can be found at the link below


Reduction in disparity for pneumonia hospitalisations between Australian indigenous and non-Indigenous children

Pneumonia hospitalisations and the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children has declined by a third. The unique Australian pneumococcal vaccine programme is likely to have had a significant effect but changes in socioeconomic factors have also contributed to the declines.
The Abstract can be found at the link below


Events of interest

The 5th International Meeting on Indigenous Child Health in Portland, Oregon, April 19-21, 2013

The meeting provided an opportunity for general pediatricians, family physicians, nurses, community providers, and others who work with indigenous children and youth to come together to share, support, network and build partnerships to improve indigenous child health. Abstracts and conference papers can be found on http://www2.aap.org/nach/WorkshopProposals.htm

Indigenous Immunisation Workshop in Perth, Western Australia

The workshop will be held in Perth, WA later in 2013, facilitated by the Telethon Institute. A date has not been set yet so keep your eye out for further information on this workshop. There have been two previous meetings, the first was in Darwin facilitated by Menzies School of Health Research and the second in Sydney facilitated by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance.

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