

Frequently asked questions – Changes to National Immunisation Schedule and Related Payments

What changes are being made to the way the Government supports immunisation for children?

The government is introducing reforms to Australia's childhood immunisation arrangements.

These changes mean:

- Families will need to have their children fully immunised to receive the existing \$726 per child Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement, replacing the Maternity Immunisation Allowance from 1 July 2012.
- A new immunisation check will be introduced for one year olds to supplement the existing focus on immunisation at two and five years of age from 1 July 2012.
- The meningococcal C, pneumococcal and varicella ('chickenpox') vaccines will be included in the list of immunisations that are needed for a child to be fully immunised from 1 July 2013.
- A combination vaccine for measles, mumps, rubella and varicella ('chickenpox') for children aged 18 months will be added to the National Immunisation Program Schedule from 1 July 2013.

When will the changes start?

1 July 2012:

- New requirements for Family Tax Benefit Part A Supplement start, including the new immunisation checkpoint at age one
- Maternity Immunisation Allowance ceases.

1 July 2013:

- New combination vaccine for measles, mumps, rubella and varicella ('chickenpox') for children aged 18 months added to the National Immunisation Program.
- Meningococcal C, pneumococcal and varicella ('chickenpox') vaccines will be included in the list of immunisations that are needed for a child to be assessed as fully immunised.

What do families need to do to meet the new immunisation conditions linked to the Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement?

Parents will need to have had their children fully immunised during the financial years that each child turns one, two and five years of age to obtain the Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement for that period.

To meet the immunisation requirements, children will need to be 'fully immunised', be on a recognised immunisation catch up schedule, or have an approved exemption.

The list of vaccines required to be 'fully immunised' is at [list of vaccines - fully immunised](#)

The Family Assistance office will check whether a child is assessed by the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register as being fully immunised (or has an approved exemption)

at the end of the financial year when a family's payments are balanced. This happens after parents lodge their tax returns.

In addition to the vaccinations required to receive the Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement, there are other important vaccines which are recommended but are not included in the definition of fully immunised for the purposes of accessing the Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement. These include:

- the rotavirus vaccine, which is recommended at specific ages to prevent gastroenteritis caused by rotavirus in infants (a catch up program is not recommended for this vaccine); and
- additional vaccines (eg influenza and hepatitis A) or booster doses (eg pneumococcal) which are provided free of charge for children with specific medical risks or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in some States/Territories.

For more information on Australia's National Immunisation Program Schedule of recommended vaccines see www.immunise.gov.au

What changes are being made to the National Immunisation Program Schedule?

A new combination vaccine MMRV for measles, mumps, rubella and varicella ("chickenpox") for children aged 18 months will be added to the National Immunisation Program (NIP) Schedule from 1 July 2013. The addition of MMRV to the NIP will replace individual doses of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine (currently scheduled for 4 year olds) and the chickenpox vaccine (currently scheduled for 18 month olds).

This will reduce by one the total number of injections currently provided as part of the program. Children will be protected against measles, mumps and rubella 2.5 years earlier than under the existing schedule.

The meningococcal C, pneumococcal and varicella ("chickenpox") vaccines are currently listed on the National Immunisation Program schedule. These vaccines will be added to the list of immunisations that children need to receive to be assessed as fully immunised. The expansion of the definition of "fully immunised" will reinforce the importance of these vaccines by linking them to payments to families and immunisation providers.

How will families be informed about these changes?

The families of all children registered on the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) will be fully informed about the new arrangements.

Prior to 1 July 2013, all families with children aged one, two or five years registered on ACIR will receive a letter advising of the changes to the Maternity Immunisation Allowance and the new immunisation eligibility requirements for Family Tax Benefit a (FTB A) supplement.

Prior to 1 July 2013, all families with children aged one, two or five years registered on ACIR will receive a letter describing the expanded eligibility requirements to reach the 'fully immunised' status and what parents will need to do to ensure their child meets these requirements.

How will these changes affect me if my child has already had their 18 month vaccination varicella (“chicken pox”) but hasn’t had their four year old immunisation of MMR yet?

Children who have already received their 18 month old vaccination (“chickenpox”) will still be immunised for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) at 4 years of age. This 4 year MMR schedule point will remain until all children aged between 18 months and 4 years of age as at 1 July 2013 when the new MMRV combination vaccine is introduced, reach the age of four years, that is 31 December 2015.

What do the changes mean for immunisation providers?

Information will be provided to immunisation providers to raise awareness of the link between the Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement and immunisation.

The General Practice Immunisation Incentive (GPII) provides financial incentives to general practices for monitoring, promoting and providing appropriate immunisation services to children under the age of seven years.

The aim of the GPII is to encourage at least 90 per cent of practices to fully immunise at least 90 per cent of children under seven years of age attending their practices. From 1 July 2013, the meningococcal C, pneumococcal and varicella (‘chickenpox’) vaccines will be added to the list of immunisations that children need to receive to be fully immunised, which is linked to payments to providers.

How will immunisation providers be informed about these new changes?

The Department of Health and Ageing in consultation with state and territory health departments, Medicare Australia and peak medical groups will be implementing an extensive communication strategy aimed at informing all immunisation providers about the changes and the proposed implementation approach. This will occur over the coming months, ensuring all providers are fully informed of the new requirements prior to commencement in 1 July 2012.

What exemptions will be available for the new immunisation conditions linked to the Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement?

While the Government considers that immunisation is an important health measure for children and families, existing exemptions will continue to be available.

A child may have a temporary or permanent exemption if a recognised immunisation provider determines that receiving the vaccine is medically contraindicated. A child may also receive an exemption from the immunisation requirements if a recognised immunisation provider indicates that the parent has a conscientious objection to immunising their child.

These exemptions will also continue for Child Care Benefit.

Where can I find more information?

For further information about the Immunise Australia Program and the reforms to the immunisation arrangements see www.immunise.health.gov.au

For further information about the changes to payments to families see www.fahcsia.gov.au

Information for customers about changes to the Family Tax Benefit Part A and the Maternity Immunisation Allowance can be found at www.humanservices.gov.au