

# Frequently Asked Questions

## The South Australian Public Health (Immunisation and Early Childhood Care Services) Amendment Bill 2017

### Why is immunisation so important?

Immunisation uses the body's natural defence mechanism – the immune response – to build resistance to specific infectious diseases. Immunisation is one of the most effective strategies to protect children and adults against certain diseases (called 'vaccine preventable diseases'). For most vaccine preventable diseases, immunisation not only protects individuals but also others in our community by increasing the level of immunity such that when a large percentage of people in the population are immunised against a specific disease, it becomes harder for that disease to spread. This concept is known as 'herd immunity'. Vaccine preventable diseases can be serious and although side effects can occur from immunisation, the benefits of immunisation far outweigh the risks from the diseases they seek to prevent.

### Why is it important for all children to be immunised?

Immunisation provides direct protection against vaccine preventable diseases for a vaccinated child. In addition, for many vaccine preventable diseases, if most children are vaccinated, vaccination indirectly protects people who are unable to be vaccinated, by decreasing spread of the disease. Some people cannot be vaccinated because they are too young to have some vaccines, or have certain medical conditions. The more children who are vaccinated the greater our ability to control vaccine preventable diseases.

Unless a child has medical reasons why vaccination is not safe, all children should be immunised with all the recommended vaccines at the age scheduled to provide the best protection for that child and the community.

### Why are the proposed amendments being considered?

Immunisation coverage in South Australia is generally good with 92-93% of children in the three measured aged groups fully vaccinated<sup>1</sup>. However given the serious public health risk posed by vaccine preventable diseases there is still room for improvement.

The proposed amendments aim to:

- > further improve the overall immunisation coverage in South Australia
- > reduce pockets of under-immunisation in South Australia
- > improve the ability to control vaccine preventable disease in early childhood care services
- > improve recording of vaccines given.

### What are the proposed amendments?

The proposed amendments are:

- > Children must be age appropriately immunised, on an immunisation catch-up program, or meet the exemption requirements (e.g. they are unable to be immunised for medical reasons) in order to attend early childhood care services.
- > Parents/guardians will need to provide early childhood care services with evidence that their child meets the immunisation requirements. These records will need to be kept by the service whilst the child is enrolled.
- > A child with a vaccine preventable disease, or who is at risk of getting a vaccine preventable disease, may be excluded from the early childhood care service when an outbreak of that disease is occurring at the service.

### What immunisations will be required?

The required immunisations are those which protect against the diseases listed on the National Immunisation Program (NIP) Childhood Schedule (excluding hepatitis A, and influenza). Diseases covered include hepatitis B, rotavirus, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough (pertussis), polio, Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib), pneumococcal infection, measles, mumps, rubella, varicella and meningococcal infection type C. Protection against multiple diseases may be included in a single vaccine. Currently the NIP Childhood Schedule is given over seven schedule points: birth, 2 months (recommended at 6 weeks), 4 months, 6 months, 12 months, 18 months and 4 years.

<sup>1</sup> The three measured age groups are children aged:

- > 12 months to less than 15 months
- > 24 months to less than 27 months, and
- > 60 months to less than 63 months

Refer <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/acir-curr-data.htm>



## Frequently Asked Questions

Usually, if vaccinations are missed these are able to be caught up. However, in some instances this may not be possible (such as rotavirus vaccine) or not necessary (such as Hib vaccine in older children). Vaccines which are unable to or not necessary to be caught up are NOT included in the proposed amendments.

The following are not included in the proposed amendments:

- > The additional vaccinations on the NIP Childhood Schedule for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (i.e. hepatitis A at 12 and 18 months of age, annual influenza vaccination, and pneumococcal vaccination at 12 months of age).
- > The additional vaccinations on the NIP Childhood Schedule for medically at risk children (i.e. annual influenza vaccination, and pneumococcal vaccination at 4 years of age).

For more information about the NIP visit: <http://www.immunise.health.gov.au>

### **I am an early childhood care services operator: how will this affect me?**

Parents/guardians will be required to provide early childhood care service providers with evidence that their child meets the immunisation requirements. This may be:

- > an Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) immunisation history statement that indicates the child is up to date, or
- > documents of a kind approved by the Chief Public Health Officer that indicates the child meets the immunisation requirements, or
- > a certificate in writing issued by the Chief Public Health Officer that indicates the child meets the immunisation requirements.

This evidence will need to be provided in accordance with requirements of the Chief Public Health Officer. These requirements have not yet been determined, but are likely to be when the child has passed the 6 month, 12 month, 18 month and 4 year immunisation schedule points.

Early childhood care service providers will not be permitted to enrol a child for the provision of the service, and must suspend the existing enrolment of any child who does not meet the immunisation requirements, or for whom immunisation requirement evidence has not been provided. These immunisation requirements do not apply to any child who meets the exemptions as specified by the Chief Public Health Officer.

Early childhood care service providers will be required to keep a copy of the provided evidence of immunisation status of each child enrolled at the early childhood care service.

When an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease is occurring at the early childhood care service, if directed by the Chief Public Health Officer or delegate, the operator will not be permitted to allow a specified child or children to attend the centre. The specified child (or children) either has been diagnosed with that vaccine preventable disease, or would be at material risk of contracting that vaccine preventable disease if he or she were to attend the early childhood care service.

### **What services are included?**

Early childhood care services are those which provide care of young children (under the age of 6 years) for fee or reward such as:

- > childcare (also called centre based care, long day care and early learning centres)
- > family day care
- > preschool and kindergarten
- > rural care program
- > mobile child care services
- > occasional care.

The proposed amendments do not include:

- > schools
- > informal baby sitting
- > lessons such as music or swimming lessons
- > playgroups
- > crèche
- > out of hours school care
- > holiday programs and camps.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **How do I know if my child is up to date with immunisations?**

Children who are up to date with their immunisations will have 'up to date' on their current AIR immunisation history statements. You can obtain your child's immunisation history statement from myGov <https://my.gov.au/>, by visiting a Medicare Service Centre or by telephoning the AIR on 1800 653 809.

For more information about how to check your child's immunisation records, visit the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) section of the Commonwealth Department of Human Services website: <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/medicare/australian-immunisation-register>

## **What is an AIR immunisation history statement?**

An AIR immunisation history statement is provided by the Australian Government Department of Human Services. Under 'Immunisation status', it states either 'up to date' or 'not up to date'. It also records the vaccines your child has received, and when the next immunisation/s are due.

## **My child is up to date, will these proposed changes affect me?**

You will be required on enrolment or, if your child already attends an early childhood care service, on commencement of this legislation, to provide your early childhood care service(s) with a copy of the immunisation history statement for your child or other evidence that your child meets the immunisation requirements (unless your child meets the exemptions as specified by the Chief Public Health Officer).

This evidence will need to be provided again in accordance with requirements of the Chief Public Health Officer. These requirements have not yet been determined but are likely to be when your child has passed the 6 month, 12 month, 18 month and 4 year immunisation schedule points.

Whilst there is an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease occurring at the service your child may be excluded.

## **My child is not up to date, will these proposed changes affect me?**

Early childhood care service providers will not be permitted to enrol your child or must suspend your child's current enrolment (unless your child meets the exemptions as specified by the Chief Public Health Officer), until your child's immunisation history is considered 'up to date'.

As soon as your child has commenced a vaccination catch up schedule, your child is considered 'up to date'. Your child will be able to enrol and continue enrolment in early childhood care services provided your child continues on the catch up schedule until your child is age appropriately immunised.

Whilst there is an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease occurring at the service your child may be excluded.

## **My child is catching up their immunisations, how will this affect me?**

You will be required on enrolment or, if your child already attends an early childhood care service, on commencement of this legislation, to provide your early childhood care service(s) with a copy of the immunisation history statement for your child or other evidence that your child meets the immunisation requirements (unless your child meets the exemptions as specified by the Chief Public Health Officer).

The immunisation history statement of your child will state 'up to date' if your child is currently on a catch up schedule. Your child will be able to enrol and continue enrolment in early childhood care services provided your child continues on the catch up schedule and becomes age appropriately immunised.

Whilst there is an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease occurring at the service your child may be excluded.

## **My child can't receive all the usual vaccines for medical reasons, how will this affect me?**

Some children are unable to be immunised for medical reasons (such as severe allergy or a severely suppressed immune system). If all other children (and staff) within the early childhood care service that these children attend are fully vaccinated, these potentially vulnerable children are provided with a circle of protection against most vaccine preventable diseases.

Children who have received all the vaccines they can safely receive will have an immunisation history statement that states 'up to date', and will still be able to commence and maintain enrolment in an early childhood care service.

Whilst there is an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease occurring at the service your child may be excluded.

## **Is my child still able to attend an early childhood care service if there is an outbreak of disease?**

If directed by the Chief Public Health Officer or delegate, early childhood care services providers will not be permitted to allow a child with a vaccine preventable disease, or a child who is at material risk of acquiring that vaccine preventable disease, to attend the service when an outbreak of that vaccine preventable disease is occurring at the service.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **The proposals are complex, will further information be available?**

A detailed guide to assist early childhood care service providers and parents/guardians will be made available after the proposed amendments are legislated.

## **Shouldn't immunisation be a personal choice?**

The proposal does not mandate vaccinations, nor does it require the administration of vaccines without consent. Parents may continue to make a choice not to vaccinate their children.

Governments have a responsibility to make decisions that balance the best possible community health outcomes with individual choices. Preventing problems before they occur is vital to good health.

The purpose of the proposed amendments is to increase immunisation rates in the community, particularly amongst young children. This is a public health priority, given the serious risk posed by vaccine preventable diseases and the proven safety and efficacy of vaccines.

## **How long will the consultation period be open?**

Consultation on the proposed amendments will be open for three weeks from Monday 24 July to Friday 11 August 2017.

## **How will your feedback be used?**

Feedback received during the consultation period will be reviewed and may influence the proposed amendments.

## **I would like to provide feedback on the proposal, how do I do that?**

Visit [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/reviewsandconsultation](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/reviewsandconsultation) to view the proposed amendments to the South Australian Public Health Act 2011 and to find more information on providing feedback.

You can submit feedback in one of the following ways:

- > email: [HealthCommunicableDiseases@sa.gov.au](mailto:HealthCommunicableDiseases@sa.gov.au)
- > post:  
Communicable Disease Control Branch  
PO Box 6  
Rundle Mall SA 5000
- > online comments [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/reviewsandconsultation](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/reviewsandconsultation)
- > online survey [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/reviewsandconsultation](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/reviewsandconsultation)

For more general information on immunisation visit [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation)

## For more information

**Communicable Disease Control Branch**  
**Public Health and Clinical Systems**  
**PO Box 6**  
**Rundle Mall SA 5000**  
**Telephone: 1300 232 272**  
**[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)**  
**Public-I2-A1**

© Department for Health and Ageing, Government of South Australia.  
All rights reserved. FIS: 17014.10. Printed July 2017.



[www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons](http://www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons)



**Government  
of South Australia**

SA Health