

Issue 1 – February 2020

Happy new year and welcome to 2020

As we move into the new year, it's time to reflect on what was a busy and productive 2019 for immunisation in the ACT.

The 2019 influenza season commenced earlier and lasted longer than any flu season in the preceding 10 years. The Vaccine Management Unit at ACT Health delivered in excess of 110,000 flu vaccines to immunisation providers across the ACT!

In 2019, the ACT introduced two pilot programs for Canberrans aged 65 years and over to access the government funded influenza vaccine through some pharmacies and Walk-in-Centres.

The influenza immunisation education evening for healthcare workers continued to be very popular and well patronised. ACT Health will continue to offer immunisation education programs during 2020.

In addition to flu vaccines, the Vaccine Management Unit delivered over 130,000 vaccines to immunisation providers across the ACT for both National and ACT immunisation programs. The ACT continued to maintain high immunisation coverage rates over the 12-month period for the three childhood age cohorts reported by the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).



Whilst overall immunisation coverage rates in the ACT remain high, challenges continue in maintaining and increasing immunisation coverage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Improving immunisation coverage rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other at-risk groups will be a priority for ACT Health during 2020.

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School vaccination catch-up

Catch up HPV vaccines for students in Year 7 in 2019 who missed out on doses at school last year can now be given by general practice. When the School Health Team complete the vaccination program, they send letters informing parents if their child missed out on any vaccines during the year.

Parents are asked to provide the letter to their General Practitioner (GP) so that the correct vaccine and dose number is ordered for the child. If a parent did not consent to vaccination through the schools' program, they will not receive a letter. These children are still eligible for government funded HPV vaccine.

Students who have missed out on Year 7 dTpa vaccine or the year 10 Meningococcal ACWY vaccine will receive a letter but are free to access a catch-up vaccine through their General Practitioner (GP) as soon as they have missed the dose.

Disease	Vaccine	Dosage	Year 7	Year 10
Human Papillomavirus (HPV)	Gardasil 9	2 doses, with a 6-12-month interval between doses.	✓	
Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis (dTpa)	Boostrix	1 dose to cover three diseases	✓	
Meningococcal ACWY	Nimenrix	1 dose		✓

Can you safely store enough vaccines?

The new year is a good time to evaluate the capacity of your vaccine fridge! Expansion of both ACT and National Immunisation Programs over recent years has resulted in more vaccines being stored in immunisation providers' fridges. Additionally, the increasing demand for influenza vaccines by Canberrans is placing further demand on vaccine fridge capacity. In 2017 ACT Health distributed approximately 57,000 Government funded influenza vaccines to immunisation providers in the ACT, compared to over 110,000 doses delivered in 2019.

The National vaccine storage guidelines 'Strive for 5' (3rd edition) states:

- Vaccine refrigerators must have the capacity to accommodate the facility's vaccine storage needs without overcrowding stock (including during influenza season);
- Vaccines MUST be stored in their original packaging because this helps to protect them from temperature fluctuations and UV light;
- Do not crowd the vaccines by overfilling the shelves, allow space between containers for air-circulation, and
- Overstocking the refrigerator places all vaccines at risk. It impedes cold air circulation and reduces the likelihood of achieving consistent, stable temperatures throughout the refrigerator.

The Vaccine Management Unit will not deliver all or part of your order if it cannot be safely stored in your refrigerator. This is particularly relevant during flu season. Due to increasing demand, delivery of urgent orders can take up to seven days, especially in periods of peak demand such as the flu vaccination season.

If your fridge has enough capacity and is maintaining cold chain, you will receive a greater number of influenza vaccines in your initial flu vaccine delivery this year.

We strongly encourage you to assess your fridge capacity to ensure it can safely store the vaccines your practice requires, so we can deliver adequate vaccine supplies to meet the needs of your business.

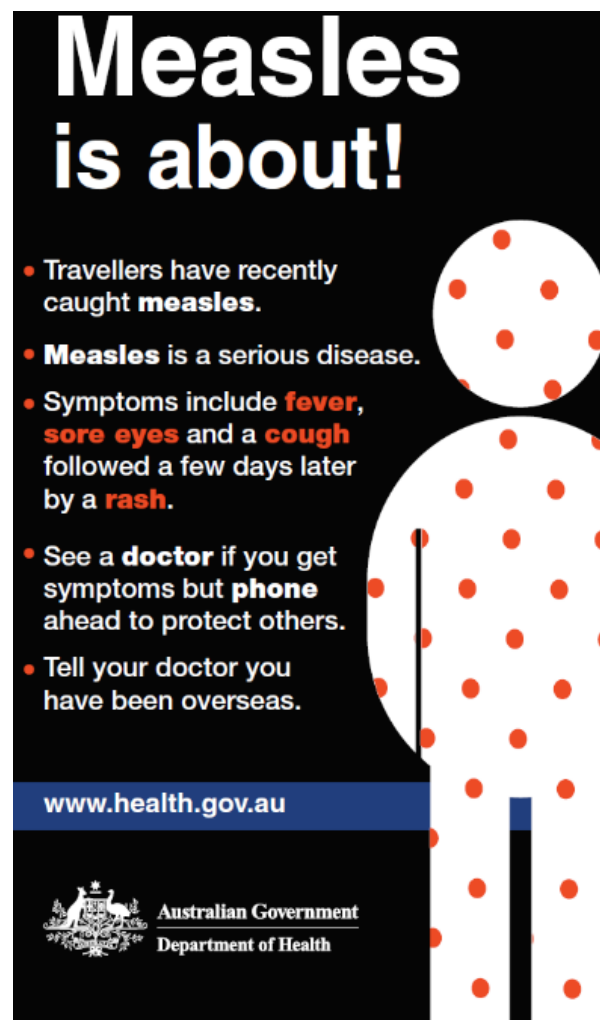
Patient travel alerts

There has been a recent surge of measles and dengue activity overseas, especially across the Pacific Region and South-East Asia. You can check recent overseas measles activity using the interactive HealthMap (<https://www.healthmap.org/en/>).

If you have patients who are travelling overseas, check where they are going and please consider/provide the following advice:

Measles


- Immunisation with a measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine is the best protection against measles.
- MMR vaccines are government funded and free for anyone born during or since 1966 who have not previously received two measles-containing vaccines. If your patient is unsure whether they have received two vaccine doses, having another MMR at least two weeks before travelling is recommended. The MMR-II or Priorix stock in your vaccine fridge may be used.
- Measles vaccination is scheduled on the National Immunisation Program with doses at 12 months and 18 months of age. It is important that infants receive these doses on time (whether travelling or not) due to the increase in measles activity in Australia and overseas.
- Infants aged between 6 and 12 months can also receive an MMR vaccine ahead of travel to areas with high measles activity (two further doses will be required). You can contact the Immunisation Unit at ACT Health on (02) 5124 9800 for advice.
- If you have a patient who you suspect may have measles, it is important to isolate them immediately, and urgently notify Communicable Disease Control (CDC) on 02 5124 9213 (business hours) or pager 02 9962 4155 (after hours/weekends/public holidays).
- A measles fact sheet can be found here: <https://www.health.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-09/Measles.pdf>



Measles is about!

- Travellers have recently caught **measles**.
- **Measles** is a serious disease.
- Symptoms include **fever, sore eyes** and a **cough** followed a few days later by a **rash**.
- See a **doctor** if you get symptoms but **phone** ahead to protect others.
- Tell your doctor you have been overseas.

www.health.gov.au

 Australian Government
Department of Health

Reminders

Rabies and Australian Bat Lyssavirus

Pre-exposure vaccination against rabies virus is recommended for anyone who regularly handles or cares for bats or anyone intending to travel to rabies-enzootic regions. Advice on rabies-enzootic countries can be found at: https://www.who.int/health-topics/rabies#tab=tab_1

Anyone who sustains a bite, scratch or a lick on an open wound from a bat in Australia or overseas, or from a terrestrial animal overseas, should be assessed for post-exposure (PEP) rabies treatment. To enquire about accessing PEP please contact the Health Protection Service, Immunisation Unit on 51249800 or the Communicable Disease Control on call officer after hours on 9962 4155.

New presentation of Priorix and Priorix-tetra

Transitioning of the new presentation for Priorix and Priorix-Tetra vaccine is continuing over the next few months. The new look Luer Lock Plastic Rigid Tip Caps are replacing the Ceramic Coated Tip.

Vaccinations for refugees and humanitarian entrants

Refugees and other humanitarian entrants are eligible for free catch-up vaccines through the National Immunisation Program (NIP). Vaccination is a health care priority for refugees. Regardless of age, all people should receive a catch-up schedule based on their vaccination history in order to comply with the NIP schedule.

A Refugees and Humanitarian entrants' Vaccination Catch-up Guide for Australian immunisation providers can be found in the [Australian Immunisation Handbook](#).