

Secondary school immunisation program 2020 during COVID-19

Advice for parents and guardians – 5 May 2020

While most students are learning from home at present, Victoria's Chief Health Officer has advised that delivery of the secondary school immunisation program is an essential medical service and your child should still receive the required vaccines on time.

What vaccines are required?

For Year 7 (age 12-13 years) secondary school students the recommended vaccines are:

- Diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine (dTp) (1 injection)
- Human papillomavirus vaccine (HPV) (2 injections, 6 months apart)

For Year 10 (age 15-16 years) secondary school students the recommended vaccine is:

- Meningococcal ACWY (1 injection)

Some students may have received all or some of their recommended vaccines already this year. Parents / guardians would be aware when this is the case because signed parent/guardian permission is required.

What are the options for obtaining these vaccines?

Parents/carers have the following options for obtaining the necessary vaccinations for their children, if not already received:

- Attend an immunisation session provided by local council immunisation services – your school will inform you when this is available
- Visit your GP (doctor)
- For Year 10 students, visit a pharmacist immuniser service. This service can only vaccinate Year 10 students aged from 15 years and older.

Why attend a local council immunisation session?

As with previous years, the local council immunisation service will work with your school, and your school will

communicate with you about when and where an immunisation session will take place.

Local council immunisation services design sessions to suit their communities. They are staffed by specialist immunisation nurses.

These sessions may be provided at your school or your school and the local council may determine an alternative venue that better facilitates the required social distancing and hygiene requirements under current restrictions.

The Victorian government has provided guidance for local council immunisation services on how to make these sessions as safe and effective as possible. These sessions are provided free.

What safety precautions will councils be putting in place at immunisation sessions?

Council immunisation services have been advised to:

- move vaccination services to larger spaced community venues if required for social distancing/hygiene
- consider using a booking system to space attendance
- display signage at the entrance of immunisation sessions that specifies unwell people (such as those with fever, sore throat, runny nose, shortness of breath, or a cough) and those who have recently returned from overseas travel are not to attend immunisation sessions
- provide hand washing or sanitising facilities at the entrance or reception area

- arrange client seating, queueing and administration so that there is 1.5 metres between clients and between clients and staff
- limit the vaccine process to one adult with the child being vaccinated (unless there are special circumstances)
- minimise physical contact with client record documents
- make hand cleaning facilities available to nurse immunisers between clients
- regularly clean surfaces with an alcohol-based disinfectant.

Shouldn't we be staying at home?

Travel and attendance at an immunisation service or to receive a vaccine is considered an essential activity under stage 3 restrictions, which allow for Victorians to leave their homes to seek medical care. One parent or carer should accompany students.

Maintaining existing public health initiatives, such as the secondary school immunisation program, is a priority at a time when of safe and effective vaccination programs are so important.

What about the other options for obtaining the vaccines?

- **Your GP** can provide the vaccines. You will need to make an appointment and accompany your child. Be aware that, while the vaccines are free under the National Immunisation Program, your GP may charge an appointment fee.
- **A pharmacist immuniser** may also be able to provide the necessary vaccine (to Year 10 students only). Pharmacist immunisers are registered pharmacists with extra training that allows them to give some vaccines to some groups. Call your local pharmacist to find out if they can provide this service. You will need to accompany your child.

Will there be a record that my child has received the required vaccination/s?

Vaccinations that are free under the National Immunisation Program should be recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register by the immunisation provider. You may wish to confirm this with the immunisation provider at the time the vaccine is given.

The Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) is a national register administered by Medicare that records all vaccinations given in Australia, including to children.

If you have a Medicare number, you can access your child's records on the Australian Immunisation Register through the Medicare online services website or by calling the Register on 1800 653 809.

Why not delay the vaccine program until students are attending school again?

Any delay in the delivery of vaccines may not be able to take place if an increase in community transmission of the COVID-19 virus should occur. At present stage 3 restrictions allow for the program to go ahead.

Going ahead with the program while adhering to social distancing and hygiene measures ensures the health of our Year 7 and 10 students.

In the case where Year 7 students have received their first dose of HPV, a second dose is required after a minimum of six months for the best protection.

For Year 10 students, timely vaccination against meningococcal disease is important because - although meningococcal disease is uncommon - it can become very serious, very quickly. Adolescents are at increased risk of meningococcal disease.

What if I have more questions?

If you have any questions regarding the delivery of the secondary school immunisation program, please contact your school or local council immunisation service.

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 1300 882 008, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email immunisation@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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Available at <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation/vaccination-adolescents>