National Immunisation Program

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Initiative

This factsheet is informed by conversations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about vaccination.

Yarning about vaccination

Getting vaccinated can help protect you and your mob from dangerous infectious diseases. This fact sheet helps you understand how vaccination works so you can share ideas with mob. Together, you can make decisions that help protect your community.

Vaccination and immunisation

'I've heard people say "vaccination" and "immunisation". Are they the same thing?'

When people use these words, they are usually referring to using vaccines to protect themselves and others from infectious diseases.

- Vaccination means getting a vaccine.
- Immunisation is the protection your body builds against a disease after vaccination.

So, in conversation, vaccination and immunisation can mean the same thing, but they describe different steps in helping your body build immunity.

Herd immunity – protecting mob

'I'm healthy. If everyone else gets vaccinated, do I really need to?'

This is something people might wonder if the rest of their mob are already vaccinated.

When enough people in your community are vaccinated, it makes it much harder for diseases to spread. This is called 'community immunity' or 'herd immunity'.

Herd immunity is an important way to protect people who are more likely to get sick or who can't get a vaccine, such as:

- babies who are too young to get their vaccines
- pregnant women
- older mob
- people who have an immune system that doesn't work very well
- people who are being treated for serious illnesses, such as cancer.

Herd immunity only works when enough people get vaccinated. If you get vaccinated, you'll be helping to protect your whole community.

Costs of vaccination

'Do I have to pay for my vaccinations?'

All recommended vaccines on the National Immunisation Program (NIP) Schedule are free.

Other vaccines may be free for mob, depending on which state or territory you live in.

At some clinics you may need to pay for your appointment, even if the vaccine is free. It's a good idea to ask about any costs when you make an appointment.

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Side effects

'My friend said they felt sick after their vaccine. Will this happen to me?'

Hearing stories like this can make you feel unsure or worried about getting vaccinated.

Vaccines, like medicines, can sometimes cause side effects. Most are mild and only last a couple of days.

Common side effects can include:

- a sore arm (including redness or swelling) where the vaccine was given
- feeling tired
- a mild fever
- headache or muscle aches.

These side effects are a sign that your body is responding to the vaccine and building your immunity.

Sometimes people can have more serious side effects, but this is rare. Talk to your health professional about this. They will know what to look out for and what to do if this happens.

You might also hear the words 'adverse events'. An adverse event after vaccination is any health problem that happens after getting a vaccine. This might be a side effect caused by the vaccine or it might not be related to the vaccine at all.

Vaccines at all ages

'I had lots of vaccines when I was a kid. Do I still need more now I am older?'

Yes. Different vaccines are recommended at different ages to protect all mob from serious diseases.

The recommended vaccines are for specific ages – from birth to when you're older. This way, everyone is protected when it is needed most.

You may also need extra vaccines if you:

- are pregnant
- do certain types of work
- live or work in certain areas
- have certain medical risk conditions.

Vaccine ingredients

'I don't really know what's in a vaccine. What are they made of?'

It's normal to want to know what's going into your body.

Vaccines are made using different ingredients that help your body recognise and fight diseases safely.

Experts carefully test and check the ingredients to make sure they work and are safe before a vaccine can be used.

Catch-up vaccines

'I didn't get vaccinated when I was a kid. Is it too late to get the vaccines I missed?'

No. It's never too late to ask about vaccination.

If you missed some vaccines when you were younger, it's important to catch up so you have the best protection against diseases as you get older. You can still help keep mob safe.

Yarn with your health professional to find out which vaccines you've already had and which ones you may still need.

You may be able to get catch-up doses for free.

Booster doses

'I've already been vaccinated against some diseases. Why do I need to get that vaccine again?'

Sometimes vaccines need 2 or more doses to make sure your body builds a strong immune response.

Some vaccines also need a top-up (booster dose) later. A booster dose helps your body remember how to defend against a disease and helps keep your protection strong.

Not all vaccines need a booster.



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School and vaccinations

'Can my children still go to school if they don't have all their vaccines?'

Most schools still allow children to attend if they have not been vaccinated.

Schools will ask for an Immunisation History Statement so they know which vaccines each child has had. If there is a particular disease outbreak at the school, unvaccinated or partially vaccinated children may be told to stay at home until the outbreak has passed.

Some childcare centres and early education centres may not allow children who are unvaccinated to attend. Check with your centre to find out their vaccination requirements.

If your child is not vaccinated, you may not be able to access family assistance payments. This is known as 'No Jab, No Pay'.

Health information – what's real

'There's a lot of health information online. How do I know what's true?'

You may see a lot of information about health, including vaccines, on the internet and social media. Not all of it is true, even if it looks real. Some information is wrong and some is even made to trick or scare people into making a decision about getting vaccinated.

Before you believe or share health information, ask yourself:

- Who shared this?
- Can I trust this person or organisation?
- Do they give proof, or are they just telling me that something is good or bad?
- Does the information sound too good to be true?
- Does it match information from my health service or health professional?

You can find trustworthy information from Aboriginal health services, hospitals and local health services, worldwide health organisations (such as the World Health Organization), qualified health professionals and government health departments.

If you are still unsure about some information you have seen, ask your trusted health professional or an Elder about where to find accurate information.

Bush medicines and vaccines

'I take bush medicine. Does this interact with vaccines?'

Most mob taking bush medicines can safely get vaccinated. If you are taking bush medicines and want to get vaccinated, visit a clinic that regularly cares for mob to make sure any possible interactions can be planned for.

Keep on yarning

'I still have questions about vaccines. Some of my mob also have questions. How can we find out more?'

Not everyone has the same access to information. Some people may not have heard about vaccines or the diseases they help protect against.

If you're unsure about vaccination or what a word or phrase about vaccination means, have a yarn with your health professional.

It's ok to take time to ask, listen and think about the information, and make decisions about vaccination together with your mob and health professionals.

Have a yarn with your mob or Elders about vaccination too. Encourage them to ask questions and start their own yarning with a trusted health professional. Sharing knowledge can help everyone make informed decisions.

You can also visit health.gov.au/vaccination-for-first-nations to see more trusted information for mob about vaccines.

