

**Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI)
73rd meeting
20 and 21 February 2020**

ATAGI Bulletin

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) 73rd meeting was held on 20 and 21 February in Canberra.

Meningococcal disease

- ATAGI reviewed the epidemiology of meningococcal disease in Australia using data from the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System up to 30 September 2019. The notification rate for invasive meningococcal disease has decreased sharply since 2017 and the most frequent serogroup isolated is serogroup B.
- ATAGI noted the large disparity in notification rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children aged under 5.
- ATAGI discussed the recommendation from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) to list Bexsero (meningococcal B vaccine) on the National Immunisation Program (NIP). The recommendation included vaccination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants, and for all people with specified medical conditions (specifically, people with asplenia or hyposplenia, complement deficiency, or those undergoing treatment with eculizumab). For the booster dose for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants at 12 months of age, this recommendation would mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants in the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia will receive 5 different injections at 12 months of age.

HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine

- ATAGI was concerned about the global shortage of HPV vaccine and the recommendation from the World Health Organization's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) to temporarily postpone HPV immunisation programs for populations other than adolescent girls. SAGE was deeply concerned that the current shortage of HPV vaccine could result in failure to introduce or sustain HPV vaccination programs in some countries, particularly in those with a high burden of cervical cancer.
- ATAGI voiced its support for countries in the region to have equitable access to HPV immunisation. The Western Pacific region has one of the highest rates of cervical cancer in the world. Many countries in the region have completed pilot programs or demonstration projects and are now ready to implement national programs, but these may be disrupted due to the supply shortage.
- ATAGI considered potential options to free up global supply of HPV vaccine, but received advice that a change in Australia's supply contracts would be unlikely to positively affect the global shortage.
- ATAGI decided to monitor and review the emerging evidence for the effectiveness of a single dose schedule of HPV vaccine or a 2-dose schedule with an extended interval between the doses (1+1 schedule) as information becomes available, and consider the options for Australia's HPV program.

Australian Immunisation Handbook

- ATAGI reviewed the outcomes of the pilot use of GRADE to review Handbook recommendations for influenza vaccines.

COVID-19 disease and vaccines

- ATAGI discussed the many activities underway to monitor COVID-19 (novel coronavirus). Members noted the list of candidate vaccines for COVID-19 and heard from the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) about the options for registering and/or accessing a new vaccine in an emergency.

Upcoming changes to the National Immunisation Program

- The NIP will be updated from 1 July 2020 to reflect recent recommendations from the PBAC for pneumococcal vaccines and meningococcal vaccines. ATAGI discussed the clinical statements and other communication materials that will be published in the coming months to support the NIP changes.
- ATAGI will consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups to develop the communication materials and messages for the NIP changes that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Vaccine safety

- ATAGI reminds immunisation providers that live viral vaccines, such as MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) or the currently available herpes zoster vaccine, are contraindicated in people who are immunocompromised. The [Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) has more details. Members discussed the potential for additional education for immunisation providers about this issue, within a framework of the quality use of vaccines.

ATAGI membership

- Professor Jodie McVernon is standing down as ATAGI member. ATAGI thanked Professor McVernon for her significant contribution to the NIP and service to the committee.
- ATAGI noted the important role of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative on the committee, which is currently vacant.

Other ATAGI business

- ATAGI focused on strategic planning, and discussed its terms of reference, policies and procedures, and communication products. In particular, members reviewed [ATAGI's strategic intent document](#) and discussed options for updating this document.
- ATAGI also discussed its communication products and options for communicating its strategic perspective on immunisation issues to a broad audience.
- ATAGI noted that the panel of vaccine evaluation groups had been established, as published on [AusTender](#). From 1 July 2020, the vaccine evaluation groups will perform preliminary assessments of all requests for PBAC presubmission advice for listing vaccines on the Determination (as a first step to listing vaccines on the NIP), with guidance from ATAGI. ATAGI will then provide its formal presubmission advice to the PBAC and the sponsor based on these evaluations.

- ATAGI discussed the upcoming annual Industry Day on 21 May 2020 and considered potential questions for sponsors about their current and proposed vaccines.

Other issues in immunisation

- ATAGI noted a summary of recent deliberations and recommendations from key national immunisation technical advisory groups (NITAGs) of interest from the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS).

Notes and resources

- ATAGI's membership, terms of reference and information on declarations of interest are available on the [Department of Health website](#).
- The digital [Australian Immunisation Handbook](#) is available on the Department's website.
- The summary report of decisions of key immunisation technical advisory groups of interest will be available on the [NCIRS website](#).
- Information on NITAGs worldwide is available on the [NITAG Resource Centre website](#).
- Next ATAGI meeting: 22 May 2020, via teleconference. The meeting agenda will be published on the Department of Health website shortly before the meeting. Industry Day scheduled for 21 May 2020 has been cancelled.