



Australian Government

Department of Health

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

Important information about a new pertussis booster for 18 month olds

A pertussis booster (provided as a combination vaccine for diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis, DTPa) has been added to the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for children aged 18 months.

Dear Colleague

I am writing to inform you that a pertussis booster has been added to the NIP schedule for children at 18 months of age. The booster dose complements pertussis containing vaccinations given at two, four and six months with booster doses given at four years and 10 to 15 years. Supplies of the vaccine will be available from March 2016.

The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) considers the introduction of a pertussis booster dose at 18 months necessary from a public health perspective to improve pertussis control. This is due to waning immunity following primary immunisation and an increase in the number of infections in the two to nine year old age group in recent years.

Introduction of the booster dose at 18 months on the NIP is intended to lead to a reduction in cases of pertussis in the 18 month to four year old age group. While pertussis is not a severe disease in the majority of these children, this cohort plays an important role in overall disease transmission, particularly to vulnerable younger infants. A high proportion of hospitalisations, and almost all deaths, attributed to pertussis occur in infants too young to have received more than one dose of pertussis-containing vaccine.

Targeted, enhanced surveillance of adverse events will be undertaken as part of the program roll-out. I encourage you to report any adverse events following immunisation to the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). Go to the 'report a problem' link via the TGA website at www.tga.gov.au or report adverse events through the usual reporting mechanisms in your state or territory.

In order to maintain a complete immunisation history, all vaccines administered to children should be notified to the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register via usual methods.

I have enclosed a factsheet and two posters: one promoting the 18 month booster; and the other displaying the updated NIP schedule from birth to four years. You can order more of these materials from the Immunise Australia website at www.immunise.health.gov.au or by calling 1800 671 811.

Further information about the pertussis vaccine is available in the *Australian Immunisation Handbook, 10th edition (2015 update)* and on the Immunise Australia website at www.immunise.health.gov.au

Please share this information with others in your practice (including locums) who administer or prescribe vaccines.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christopher J. Baggoley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Professor Chris Baggoley

February 2016