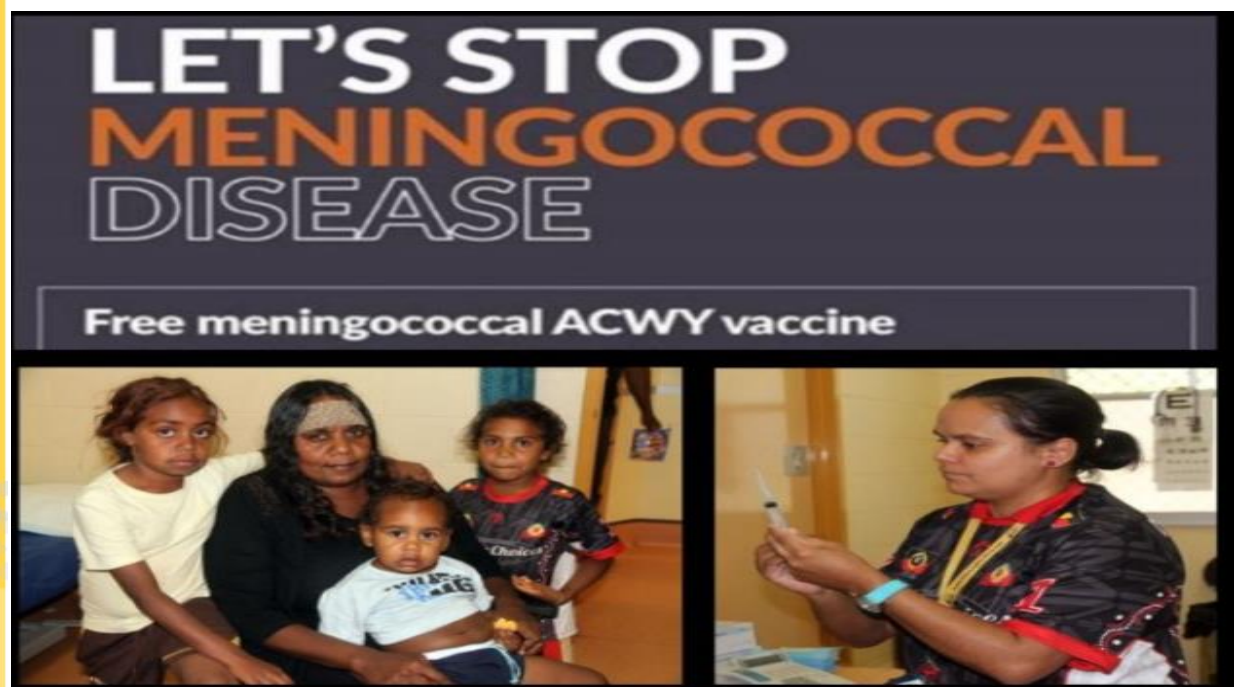




National Indigenous Immunisation message stick newsletter October 2017

Meningococcal epidemic targeting Indigenous youth in NT 'must be taken seriously'



Vanessa Smith is making sure her three grandchildren are vaccinated against meningococcal

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Alice Springs, NT Chief Medical Officer Public Health, Dr John Boffa has urged everyone in the community to take this epidemic very seriously.

He says Aboriginal community controlled health services and NT government clinics were doing well to stop the spread of the virus but warns parents and Indigenous youth that the correct early prevention steps must be taken



Dr Boffa says the results of this epidemic “highlights the extreme inequality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the NT.” He says the NT is desperate for more hands-on help to look after people impacted by the disease.

The meningococcal disease outbreak continues to hit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people living in Central Australia, the Barkly, Katherine and Katherine West regions.

“We urgently need extra help! We need more nurses throughout the territory. If there are any nurses who want work as locums they should contact the central Australia Aboriginal congress in Alice Springs or send me an email John.boffa@caac.org.au we want your help!”

This week, a mass vaccination program is being rolled out in the affected regions. Coordinated by the NT Centers for Disease Control (CDC), government and non-government health services, including Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations will be able to offer NT Health funded vaccines.

A free vaccine will be offered to all Indigenous people aged between 12 months and 19 years, living in remote communities. Aboriginal people aged between 12 months and 19 years living in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine will also have access to the vaccine.

People are also able to pay for the vaccine at their local doctor. There are two vaccines available – one costs \$49 while the other is \$118 and authorities have advised that ‘the cheaper one is just as effective’

After working in the public health communal disease sector for nearly 30 years, Mr Boffa, speaking on behalf of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, has urged for action to be taken as soon as possible in the NT, such as changes to the national child immunisation schedule.

“This epidemic means plans need to be sped up so we’ll have population protection through routine immunisation of children.”

Dr Boffa says Aboriginal community controlled health services and NT government clinics were doing well to stop the spread of the virus.

“The positive thing is the health system has diagnosed people early, gotten them to hospital and out of the 25 cases in the NT so far, We’ve been able to pick them up quickly and get them effectively treated.”



Dr Boffa warns parents and Indigenous youth that the correct early prevention steps must be taken.

“The disease presents differently and is hard to clearly identify – which is why any sick child with a fever needs to be assessed and get to their local clinic to be checked,” he said.

“If you have a late diagnosis, late being you only miss it by 24 hours, it can kill you.”

Meningococcal disease is an uncommon but very serious disease. It is treatable with antibiotics but the infection can progress very quickly. It's important for people to be aware of the symptoms and to seek medical advice early for either themselves or their children if they have any concerns.

Aboriginal health worker from Kalgoorlie is the latest to complete a program that teaches how to administer vaccinations to children.





The Bega Garnbirringy Health Service health worker graduated after taking part in the two-week course at the Nindila training Centre in Kalgoorlie.

The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA) launched the training program for Aboriginal health workers in partnership with the Communicable Disease Control Directorate at the Department of health in March 2015.

Since then, 34 Aboriginal health workers from across WA have been trained to administer vaccinations and promote immunisation.

AHCWA chairperson Michelle Nelson-Cox said the program had been initiated to improve immunisation rates amongst Aboriginal children in WA, which are the lowest in the country.

“Until this program was launched, only nurses and doctors were authorised to carry out immunisations,” she said.

“By expanding the number of Aboriginal health workers trained to administer vaccinations to children, we hope to decrease the risk of our young people contracting preventable disease

‘In addition, the added benefit of having Aboriginal health workers trained to conduct vaccinations means they can relate to Aboriginal children and gain the trust of their parents to help spread the message about the importance of immunisation.’”

A WA Auditor General’s report published last December cited immunisation rates amongst Aboriginal children, infants and toddlers as lower than the national target. It suggested the training program had helped contribute to improvements in low immunisation rates among Aboriginal children, with rates for Aboriginal infants in several regions increasing by an average of 8,5% in the year from June 2015.

“We are thrilled that it appears this training program has already contributed to immunisation rates among Aboriginal children increasing significantly in some areas,” Ms Nelson-Cox said.

“We hope that as more Aboriginal Health Workers are trained, the rates will go up even further.



“We have received an overwhelming response from our Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations, who see the value in their AHW’s being trained to administer immunisations,” she said.

Courses are planned for Broom and Carnarvon later this year.

Story published on Nacchocommunique



The top facts about immunisation

All parents want the very best for their child’s health. You’re looking after their best interests if you consider the facts so you can make an informed decision about vaccination.

- Immunisation saves lives
- Vaccines strengthen your child’s immune system
- All childhood diseases we vaccinate against can cause serious illness, including death
- 93% of five-year-old children in Australia are vaccinated – this figure needs to be as high as possible
- All vaccines available in Australia have been thoroughly tested for safety and effectiveness and are continually monitored
- Skipping or delaying vaccinations puts your child and those around you at risk of contracting serious diseases



•Immunisation is a safe and effective way of giving protection against diseases such as whooping cough and measles.

Why immunise my child?

Immunisation is a safe and effective way of protecting your child from harmful, contagious diseases. These diseases can cause serious illness, disability, and in some cases, death.

Why your child needs to be immunised

Childhood diseases such as measles and whooping cough (pertussis) are serious and potentially fatal.

Some of the diseases children are vaccinated against, like whooping cough and the flu, are still common in Australian.

Other diseases, like measles, are less common in Australia but are more common in neighbouring countries. We vaccinate children to protect them from diseases that travellers can bring here.

Some of the diseases we vaccinate children against, like polio, have become very rare because vaccination has stopped them from spreading.

We still vaccinate Australian children against these diseases so that they won't be able to come back.

Benefits of immunising

By getting your child fully vaccinated you are helping to save lives by:

- protecting your child against serious illness
- protecting vulnerable people in your community
- helping to wipe out diseases now and into the future.



How do I immunise my child?

The Australian Government provides free childhood vaccines under the National Immunisation Program for all children and young people up to 20 years of age, including refugees and other humanitarian entrants living in Australia.

These vaccines can be given by a number of recognised health providers, including:

- immunisation clinics
- general practices (your local doctor)
- some hospitals, local councils
- Aboriginal Medical Services.

Although the vaccines will be provided for free, the health provider (such as your doctor) may charge a consultation fee for the visit.

For more information about how to immunise your child you can refer to the National Immunisation Program Schedule to find out which vaccines you or your family are eligible for and book an appointment with your health provider.

<https://campaigns.health.gov.au/immunisationfacts/resources>

Save the date – PHAA 16th National Immunisation Conference

Immunisation for all: Gains, gaps and goals

**Tuesday 5th to Thursday 7th June 2018, Adelaide Convention Centre
South Australia**

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