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LEADING DOCTORS AND SCIENTISTS SPREAD THE WORD (AND THE EVIDENCE) ON THE BENEFITS OF IMMUNISATION

Launch of Australian Academy of Science booklet – The Science of Immunisation: Questions and Answers

The AMA has joined forces with the Australian Academy of Science to promote and distribute the Academy’s revised and updated booklet, *The Science of Immunisation: Questions and Answers*, an important resource to inform all Australians about the facts, evidence, and benefits of immunisation.

The booklet was launched today at Parliament House in Canberra by Health Minister, Sussan Ley; the President of the Australian Academy of Science, Professor Andrew Holmes; AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon; and Professor Peter Doherty, winner of the 1996 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his work on immune cells.

Dr Gannon said it is vital that parents are provided with the most authoritative, scientifically-backed, clear, and easy-to-understand facts and evidence about the safety and effectiveness of immunisation.

“Having children vaccinated is a significant event for every family, and it is important that parents know all there is to know about vaccination, and the Academy’s booklet answers all the questions and provides compelling evidence about the benefits to the health of the child,” Dr Gannon said.

“The Academy’s thorough scientific evidence and research, which has been provided by Australia’s leading researchers in immunology, is the perfect response to the lies, misinformation, and fear that is peddled by the anti-vaccination movement.

“Immunisation saves lives. That is an undeniable fact.

“It is important that all Australians are provided with evidence of the health benefits of immunisation to help them make the right choices.

“It is the job of doctors to reassure patients when they present with fears or concerns about immunisation.

“This booklet will help educate the general public, public health services, schools, and the media about the benefits of immunisation.”

Dr Gannon said that since the introduction of the Government’s *No Jab No Pay* policy, 6000 children previously registered as conscientious objectors are now fully immunised, but more needs to be done.

“Unfortunately, there are still areas within our community - such as the Gold Coast, Western Sydney, and the North Coast of NSW - with lower than average immunisation rates,” Dr Gannon said.

“These areas are highly susceptible to outbreaks of vaccine-preventable disease.

“The authority and clarity of the Academy’s information about the safety and efficacy of immunisation will help get the message to parents in these key areas, and ensure that Australia’s immunisation rates remain high.

“Vaccinations have brought great comfort and security to the health of the community and the Australian way of life.

“We need to be vigilant and provide the right information to keep it that way.”

Background:

- Vaccination is one of the most effective and cost effective public health interventions.
- Immunisation is an important tool to fight contagious disease by protecting individuals who are vaccinated, as well as those who are too young to be vaccinated - or those who are more vulnerable to serious complications due to underlying medical conditions - by reducing the risk of spread across the community (this is known as ‘herd’ or community immunity).
- Vaccines in Australia are regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). They are rigorously tested in human clinical trials to ensure they are safe before they are made available. Once a vaccine has been registered, it will continue to be monitored for safety (including reporting of any adverse events).
- Routine childhood immunisation was introduced in 1930-40, with the introduction of diphtheria vaccines.
- According to the World Health Organisation, vaccinations prevent two to three million deaths every year from diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), and measles.
- The childhood immunisation rates in Australia are fairly high. The recent statistics from the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register found:
 - at 12 months of age, 93 per cent of children were fully immunised;
 - at age two, 90.7 per cent of children were fully immunised; and
 - at age five, 92.9 per cent of children were fully immunised.
- Between 90-95 per cent of the population need to be fully immunised in order to protect the entire population, or achieve herd immunity.
- Since the introduction of the *No Jab No Pay* policy, almost 6000 children who had been registered as conscientious objectors have been immunised, and more than 148,000 children who were behind with their immunisations have been caught up.

To date, 72,000 copies of *The Science of Immunisation: Questions and Answers* have been distributed to key locations, including doctors’ surgeries, around Australia, with the assistance of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

The booklet is available at <https://www.science.org.au/learning/general-audience/science-booklets/science-immunisation>

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