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Transcript: AMA Vice President, Dr Tony Bartone, 2GB, 20 March 2017

Subject: Vaccination

RAY HADLEY: Now, the other story we deal with today relates to anti-vax. Now, I'm getting a bit sore, RSI, replying to emails from these nonsensical people who believe what they Google and not what the GPs tell them.

Last week, the Turnbull Government wrote to the various States and Territories, asking them to support a national policy on immunisation. The No Jab, No Play legislation would ban unvaccinated children from child care. For most people, it's a no brainer. Mr Turnbull said parents had the right to know if they were sending their children to a place where others hadn't been immunised.

But now there are calls for the Federal Government to fund a public education program to improve immunisation rates. Let me tell you, you can spend as much money as you'd like on some of these people, they are as thick as three planks and they won't change.

Now, in relation to this, we've spoken to a number of people. Today we'll speak to the Vice President of the Australian Medical Association and that's Dr Tony Bartone. Dr Bartone has more than 30 years' experience working as a GP in Melbourne. And the doctor's on the line. Doctor, good morning.

TONY BARTONE: Good morning.

RAY HADLEY: Look, we've got another story - this has surfaced yesterday in Sydney - about a mother posting on Facebook that she wanted to have a vaccine-free Australia, this week. And she'll be taking expressions of interest for vaccine-free child care. Now, I know spending money on information is one thing, but the volume of emails I get from areas in New South Wales, particularly, where it wouldn't matter how much I argue with these people, I can't convince them that vaccinations the way to go. Is that your experience, as well, with some pockets of the community?

TONY BARTONE: Look, and you're absolutely right there, Ray. There is a crust on, really hard-core 1 to 2 percenters that you will never change their mind. And we continue to try and educate them, we continue to give them the information, try and present the findings clearly, but they seem to continue to resist. There is another, say, 8 per cent, that can vacillate, and that's the core that we need to work on, to continue to press the message that vaccination is safe, it will protect your child, but more importantly, will protect all the children in the community.

RAY HADLEY: I mean, for instance, I went and had some root canal therapy, recently. My dentist sat me down for about 15 minutes, he explained to me the dangers from all sorts of things, including the anaesthetic, and there's a chance, one in a million, that I mightn't come out of it. And a colonoscopy, I had doctors, specialists, told me the same thing; "Ray, there's some inherent dangers here but the risk is very low, compared to the benefits".

And we're talking about them saying there's a link between vaccinations and autism, and cancer, which is disproven time and time again. And, of course, there may be a reaction in

some - minuscule - number of cases, but it doesn't justify the lunacy that we deal with all the time.

TONY BARTONE: And, you're absolutely right. Health literacy is an important part of the discussion and it takes time and it takes effort. But sometimes a little bit of information can be a bad thing if you don't get the full facts and that's what we're about - presenting the facts, presenting the information, presenting the research, and then to ensure that everyone understands that, yes, there can be reactions - as you rightly point out - but these are usually minor, self-limiting, contained, 24 hours, with a bit of Panadol, bit of time, they're gone. And it's about having that conversation and making sure you understand the benefits far outweigh any short-term risk.

RAY HADLEY: Well, I get this lunacy today - from some people - saying; oh the Prime Minister's- he's part of the health rort, you're part of it, you're earning money, no doubt you'll be the next target of it, you're earning money out of all this. I mean, I just - it's mindless. But then on the back of that, we get the story from Nimbin, which is the centre of where all these people seem to come from in New South Wales - on the North Coast of New South Wales. A seven-year-old girl is in a Brisbane hospital, in an induced coma, after being diagnosed with tetanus. She was unvaccinated. I mean, the doctor that's dealing with it said the parents are beside themselves. For God's sake. I mean, 900 people used to die because of tetanus. Now - I think last year, we had seven cases, not one death.

TONY BARTONE: And, this is exactly the point, things like tetanus, like polio, infections that we didn't see for decades, are coming back because - and simply because - of the increasing number of unvaccinated children in the community. It's such a simple thing to prevent and so simply contracted, if you're not protected, that it defies rationality why you wouldn't immunise the youngest and most susceptible members of our community, who really would suffer an immense amount of morbidity and sometimes even the mortality that comes with these unfortunate, preventable episodes.

RAY HADLEY: Now, given you and I agree that for some who will just not be convinced, is the Federal Government doing enough in relation to this? I mean, I've said yes, education is important but at the end of the day, they just Google "autism and vaccinations", and Bob's your uncle, it doesn't matter what you say - as a distinguished medical expert - or anyone else might say, based on what you tell me that these people aren't convinced. So what's the next step?

TONY BARTONE: We need to be- continue all the efforts that are currently being done. Now, the national Federal Government's laws of No Jab, No Pay has now been supplemented in some States with the No Jab, No Play policy. And the Government's been calling out for a national approach to that, and that would be a bonus or a plus in this argument. Continuing the information, making sure that the consequences, the examples in real life, the consequences when things aren't - don't follow the information, don't follow the advice, and show the misery and the suffering that their children endure.

RAY HADLEY: Dr Tony Bartone, Vice President of the Australian Medical Association.

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