

Immunisation Policy

Introduction

Immunisation programs in NSW have been extremely effective in reducing the risk of vaccine preventable diseases.

All children are able to access free vaccines under the National Immunisation Program at 6 weeks, 4 months, 6 months, 12 months, 18 months and 4 years of age to provide them with the earliest protection against 13 vaccine preventable diseases. While around 90% of children at 1 and 2 years of age in NSW are fully immunised, at least 95% coverage is needed for effective disease control.

In an effort to improve immunisation rates, the NSW Parliament passed the Public Health Amendment (Review) Bill 2017 that amended the Public Health Act 2010 to strengthen immunisation enrolment requirements in early childhood services.

Policy

Learning Links early education and care services are obliged to comply with our legal responsibilities under the NSW Public Health Act 2010 including:

- not enrolling a child unless the parent/guardian has provided an approved immunisation form that shows that the child is fully immunised for their age; or has a medical reason not to be immunised; or is on a recognised catch-up schedule.
- maintaining an immunisation register that records the up to date immunisation status of all enrolled children after each of their immunisation milestones.
- retaining immunisation records for 3 years from the date on which each enrolled child ceases to attend the service and providing a copy of a child's immunisation documentation to another service in the event that the child transfers to that service (upon request).
- notifying the local public health unit if an enrolled child has a vaccine preventable disease.

Definitions

AIR Immunisation History Form	A form completed by an immunisation provider when the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) does not have the complete immunisation history for a child, including when immunisations have been given overseas and when the immunisation provider will commence the child on a catch-up schedule for any overdue immunisations.
AIR Immunisation History Statement	<p>A statement from the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) produced for each child that records their immunisation status (up to date, fully immunised or overdue), all immunisations received, any immunisations due or overdue, whether the child has received all vaccines required by 5 years of age, and if a valid medical exemption is recorded.</p> <p>Statement is mailed to parents/guardians after their child has completed their immunisation at 4 years of age.</p> <p>AIR Immunisation Statements for children who are up to date will have the words "up to date" recorded on the top left-hand side of the statement. The next immunisations and their due date will be recorded in the bottom section of the statement.</p> <p>Children who have received all of their scheduled immunisations by 4 years of age will receive an up to date AIR Immunisation History Statement showing the child does not require any further immunisations before starting primary school.</p>

Approved immunisation form	The only forms that can be accepted by early childhood services as proof of a child's immunisation status as part of the enrolment process under the Public Health Act 2010, being the AIR Immunisation History Statement or the AIR Immunisation History Form (see above).
Australian Immunisation Register (AIR)	A national register that records immunisations given to people of all ages in Australia. Immunisation providers (see definition) can send immunisation information to the AIR.
Enrolment	The process of accepting and booking a guaranteed place for a child in a specific early childhood service for the first-time involving completion of an enrolment form, provision of other documentation (i.e. birth certificate, proof of address, AIR Immunisation History Statement) and often payment of a deposit. Note: making a request for care, or placing a child on a waitlist, is not enrolment. Also, enrolment does not include the process of committing an enrolled child to continued attendance in subsequent years at the same early childhood service (sometimes known as 're-enrolment').
Immunisation	The term used to describe the process of both getting a vaccine and becoming immune to the disease as a result
Immunisation provider	A provider who can give immunisations and record them on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR), including general practitioners (GPs), local councils, Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs) and community health.
Immunisation register	A register maintained by an early childhood service that records the current immunisation status of all enrolled children as required under the Public Health Act 2010.
Public Health Unit (PHU)	NSW Health staff that are responsible for identifying, preventing and minimising public health risks to the community, including working with early childhood services to manage disease outbreaks. PHUs can be contacted on 1300 066 055.

Eligibility

This policy applies to all Learning Links Children's Services staff and families. The term staff includes educators, therapists, students and volunteers.

Responsible

Responsibilities for the policy are:

Person	Responsible for
Approved Provider	<p>Approved providers cannot enrol a child unless the parent/guardian has provided an approved immunisation form that shows that the child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is fully immunised for their age, or; • Has a medical reason not to be vaccinated, or; • Is on a recognised catch-up schedule if the child has fallen behind with their immunisations. <p>From 1 January 2018:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is an offence to enrol children who are unimmunised due to their parent's conscientious objection • The 12-week temporary exemption for children evacuated during a state of emergency and those in emergency out of home care is extended to all children in out of home care and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children • It is an offence for a person to forge or falsify an approved immunisation form (which is provided to an early childhood service to enable the enrolment of a child).

Nominated Supervisor / Preschool Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain an immunisation register that records the immunisation status and forms held for all enrolled children. This information is used by the PHU to manage outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases. • Implement a system to check that at each enrolled child's immunisation milestones that an updated approved immunisation form has been provided for each child and record the details on the immunisation register. • Implement a reminder notification to families when immunisations are due. • Hold forms on site confirming children's immunisation status. • If the service is being assessed by an officer from the Department of Education provide the officer with access to the service's up to date immunisation register and approved immunisation forms to demonstrate compliance with the immunisation enrolment requirements under the Public Health Act 2010. • If an enrolled child has a vaccine preventable disease to contact the local public health unit (PHU) on 1300 066 055 and follow their directions relating to the provision of information to parents and/or the exclusion of children.
Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act in accordance with the obligations outlined in this policy and procedure.
Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act in accordance with the obligations outlined in this policy and procedure. • During the enrolment period, and prior to the agreed start date in the program, provide: • an up to date AIR Immunisation History Statement to the Preschool Manager showing the child is fully immunised for their age, or • provide a medical reason not to be vaccinated detailed on an AIR Immunisation History Statement, or • an AIR Immunisation History Form signed and dated by a GP/nurse for children on a catch-up schedule. • Provide the Preschool Manager with an updated approved immunisation form following immunisation milestones e.g. at 4 years of age.

Related documents

Relevant legislations and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and Care Services National Regulations 4.2 Division 2 (88) Infectious Diseases & 4.7 Subdivision 1 (162) (f) Health information to be kept in enrolment record. • National Quality Standards, Quality Area 2 Health and Safety. • Public Health Act 2010
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSW Health immunisation webpage www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation • Immunisation Enrolment Toolkit https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation/Publications/immunisation-enrolment-toolkit.pdf
Related Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention and Archiving of Records Policy and Procedure. • Infectious Diseases Policy and Procedure. • Privacy Policy and Procedure. • Application, Enrolment and Orientation Policy and Procedure. • Incident, Illness, Trauma and Injury Policy and Procedure.

**AIR
Immunisation
History
Statement**

The AIR provides an Immunisation History Statement to parents/guardians which is used to help keep track of their child's immunisations and as proof of immunisation for enrolment in early childhood services.

Parents/guardians can access updated statements at any time (up to the child being 14 years of age) by:

- using their Medicare online account through myGov at <https://my.gov.au/>
- using the Medicare Express Plus App at www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/express-plusmobile-apps
- calling the AIR General Enquiries Line on 1800 653 809 (mailed statement may take more than a week to arrive)

**AIR
Immunisation
Documentation
requirements**

To enrol in an early childhood service, parents/guardians must provide a copy of one of the following immunisation forms:

- a current AIR Immunisation History Statement showing that a child is 'up to date' with their immunisations, including where a child has an approved medical contraindication or natural immunity to one or more vaccines, OR
- an AIR Immunisation History Form for a child who does not have a complete immunisation history on the AIR and may be on a recognised catch-up schedule, which has been certified by an immunisation provider.

Other records cannot be accepted, such as an AIR Immunisation History Statement showing that a child is not up to date, an AIR Immunisation Medical Exemption Form, an Interim NSW Vaccination Objection Form (after 1 January 2018), the NSW Personal Health Record (Blue Book), a GP letter or an overseas immunisation record.

**Overseas
records**

Overseas immunisation records must not be accepted directly from the parent/guardian. Advise the parent/ guardian to take their child's immunisation records to an approved immunisation provider to record on the AIR using the AIR Immunisation History Form.

Overseas records must be translated into English before they can be recorded on the AIR. When the child's AIR record has been updated with their overseas immunisations, the parent/guardian can access their child's updated AIR Immunisation History Statement (see above).

**Temporary
resident visas
and refugees**

Children who have temporary resident or refugee status are required to attend a GP/nurse to have their immunisation status assessed and an AIR Immunisation History Form completed. A copy of this form must be presented to the early childhood service where they are to be enrolled.

**AIR History
Statement –
Medical
contraindicatio
ns or natural
immunity**

Parents/guardians of children who have a medical condition that prevents them from being immunised, or who have natural immunity to a vaccine preventable disease, should attend their GP/nurse to have an AIR Immunisation Medical Exemption Form completed, signed and sent to the AIR.

Parents/guardians should then access an updated AIR Immunisation History Statement that records the medical contraindication/natural immunity and provide it to the early childhood service for enrolment.

**AIR History
Form – Catch
up schedule**

The AIR Australian Immunisation History Form is completed by a GP/nurse when the AIR does not have a record of immunisations given by another immunisation provider (i.e. for vaccines given overseas), and/or the GP/nurse has organised to commence the child on a catch-up schedule for any overdue vaccines.

As catch-up schedules are not reflected on AIR Immunisation History Statements, an AIR Immunisation History Form must be signed and dated by a GP/nurse who must forward it to the AIR and provide a copy to the parent/guardian for enrolment.

Temporary exemptions to the immunisation enrolment requirements

The following classes of children can be enrolled without the approved forms, but the Preschool Manager must make reasonable efforts to source these forms within 12 weeks from the date of enrolment:

- Children evacuated following a declared natural disaster.
 - Children, who through exceptional circumstances, are determined to be in need of protection and/or placed in emergency care (e.g. children placed in emergency foster care; parent/guardian of a child needing urgent health care and the child is placed in emergency care).
 - Children subject to a guardian order or in out-of-home care.
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If an enrolled child has a vaccine preventable disease

The Preschool Manager will contact the local public health unit (PHU) on 1300 066 055 and follow their directions relating to the provision of information to parents and/or the exclusion of children.

If an enrolled child has come into contact with a person with a vaccine preventable disease

The PHU may request that our service exclude an unimmunised child if it is believed that the child has come into contact with a person with a vaccine preventable disease, even if there is not an outbreak at that early childhood service.

Retention of immunisation records

Retain records in a secure location for a period of 3 years from the date on which the enrolled child ceases to attend the service and be produced for inspection by the PHU Officer as requested i.e. during an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease.

Children transferring to another service

Should a child transfer to another service, a copy of the child's immunisation documentation must, if requested, be provided to:

- The parent/guardian for enrolment at the new early childhood service, or
 - The new early childhood service where the child is due to enrol.
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Privacy

Privacy regarding the immunisation status of all enrolled children must be maintained at all times. Should a parent/guardian enquire about the immunisation status of another enrolled child(ren), this information must not be provided. The immunisation status of enrolled children should only be provided to PHU staff upon request, for example, during an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease. Officers of the Department of Education are authorised to inspect the immunisation register.

Vaccine preventable diseases, including staff vaccination

Notifiable vaccine preventable diseases under the Public Health Act 2010:

Disease	Description
Diphtheria	Bacterial disease spread by respiratory droplets – causes severe throat and breathing difficulties, nerve paralysis and heart failure.
Tetanus	Caused by toxin of bacteria in soil – causes painful muscle spasms, convulsions and lockjaw.
Pertussis (whooping cough)	Bacterial disease spread by respiratory droplets – causes 'whooping cough' with prolonged cough lasting up to 3 months
Haemophilus Influenzae type b (Hib)	Bacterial disease spread by respiratory droplets – causes meningitis (infection of tissues around brain), epiglottitis (blockage of airway), septicaemia (blood infection) and septic arthritis (joint infection)
Polio	Virus spread in faeces and saliva – causes fever, headache and vomiting and may progress to paralysis
Measles	Highly infectious virus spread by respiratory droplets – causes fever, cough and rash
Mumps	Virus spread by saliva – causes swollen neck and salivary glands and fever
Rubella	Virus spread by respiratory droplets – causes fever, rash and swollen glands but can cause severe birth defects in babies of infected pregnant women
Meningococcal C	Bacteria spread by respiratory droplets – causes septicaemia (blood infection) and meningitis (infection of tissues around brain)

NSW Immunisation Schedule

The NSW Immunisation Schedule lists all the funded vaccines and the ages they are recommended to be given under the National Immunisation Program.

The current version is available on the NSW Health website at:
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation/publications/nsw-immunisation-schedule.pdf>

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