

Frequently Asked Questions

Early Childhood Services and Immunisation Discussion Paper

The Early Childhood Services and Immunisation Discussion Paper proposes a range of options that would require, with rare exception, children in South Australia to be up-to-date with immunisations (or on an approved catch-up program) as a condition of enrolment and potentially attendance at early childhood services.

What is the purpose of the Discussion Paper?

The State Government is committed to protecting children and believes that South Australia should have the highest childhood immunisation rates possible, leading the nation.

We are seeking the community's feedback on the Discussion Paper and ways we can further strengthen protection of children against vaccine preventable diseases.

What does the Discussion Paper include?

The Discussion Paper proposes a range of options that would require, with rare exception, children in South Australia to be up-to-date with immunisations (or on an approved catch-up program) as a condition of enrolment and potentially attendance at early childhood services.

Over the past few years, other states have passed legislation related to immunisation and childcare enrolment.

The Discussion Paper outlines the related public health issues, provides background information and investigates the experience of other Australian states. It goes into detail about each proposal and the anticipated impacts to the early education and care industry, families and children.

Given concerns raised by clinicians about potential non-health detrimental impacts on children through exclusion, the Discussion Paper draws on input received and assessments of the impact of interstate legislation.

How will feedback on the Discussion Paper be used?

Feedback from this consultation will assist us to identify issues of concern, to develop the proposals and identify any additional options or proposals for reform not already identified. This information will assist in the development of future legislation.

Once the consultation process concludes, the submissions received will be included in an analysis of the impacts of the various options and proposals.

Based on that analysis, recommendations will be made as to the preferred option and proposals to be implemented, to achieve the desired public health outcomes.



What are the main options proposed in the Discussion Paper?

The Discussion Paper proposes three options:

- > **Option 1 – Pause - No change yet.** Allow other legislative changes recently passed to be implemented first. The legislation recently passed will, once enacted, require parents or guardians to provide immunisation records to their child's early childhood service, and give the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) the power to request those records if satisfied that there is an outbreak, or risk of an outbreak, of a vaccine preventable disease (VPD) at the service. In the event of an outbreak of a VPD at an early childhood service, the CPHO will have power to exclude a child from the service.

- > **Option 2 – Require children at enrolment to be up-to-date with immunisation (or on a recognised immunisation catch-up program) to be able to enrol in early childhood services (unless medically exempted or meeting other prescribed exclusion criteria).**
 - Option 2a – Apply to all children under 3 years.
 - Option 2b – Apply to all children under 6 years.

- > **Option 3 – Require children at enrolment and ongoing to be up-to-date with immunisation (or on a recognised immunisation catch-up program), to be able to enrol and to maintain their enrolment ongoing in early childhood services (unless medically exempted or other prescribed exclusion criteria).**
 - Option 3a – Apply to all children under 3 years.
 - Option 3b – Apply to all children under 6 years.

- > **Options – Exemption for some categories**

The Discussion Paper also includes the option of exempting some categories of children from the immunisation requirements for enrolment or attendance in early childhood services, and possible categories of exemption.

What are Early Childhood Services?

For the purpose of this Discussion Paper, an early childhood service is defined as a service for the education or care (or both) of a child under the age of 6 years such as childcare, family day care, pre-school, kindergarten and early learning centre services.

It does not include compulsory schooling; in South Australia, all children must be enrolled in and attending school by their sixth birthday.

What are the current immunisation rates in South Australia?

Although immunisation coverage in South Australia is good, in most areas it falls short of the 95% target, with coverage between 86% and 95%. Coverage is even lower in some pockets.

The recent Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) annualised quarterly report on childhood immunisation coverage (for the March, June, September and December 2018 assessment quarters) indicates that statewide immunisation coverage in South Australia is generally good, with coverage rates as follows:

- > **94.25% of one year olds** (12 months to less than 15 months) are fully immunised
- > **91.1% of two year olds** (24 months to less than 27 months) are fully immunised
- > **94.67% of five year olds** (60 months to less than 63 months) are fully immunised.

What exemptions are explored in the Discussion Paper?

The Discussion Paper (under Proposal 2) aims to prescribe the categories of children for whom exemptions from immunisation requirements for enrolment into early childhood services would apply.

Exemptions would be broadly consistent with those approved for the national [No Jab No Pay](#) requirements, i.e. a recognised medical exemption, or have an alternative immunisation certificate from the CPHO where the CPHO is satisfied that special circumstances exist.

Examples of valid medical reasons why a child could not be fully vaccinated include:

- > an anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose of a particular vaccine
- > an anaphylactic reaction to any vaccine component
- > has a disease which lowers immunity (such as leukaemia, cancer, HIV/AIDS, SCID)
- > is having treatment which lowers immunity (such as chemotherapy).

What exemptions are not proposed in the Discussion Paper?

It is not proposed that certain categories of children, e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (who currently have high vaccination rates in SA), children under guardianship, or otherwise vulnerable and disadvantaged children be exempted from the requirements proposed, as is the case in some other states.

Rather, SA Health will explore ways to assist under-vaccinated children, in particular those who are identified as being vulnerable and/or disadvantaged, to become up-to-date, in order to provide both the best possible health protection and to avoid compromising their access to early childhood education.

In addition to becoming up-to-date with vaccinations, these efforts may have an added advantage of getting these children linked to healthcare providers for ongoing care. Assistance may include providing immunisation advice and reassurance through to linking parents to community health centres, local council immunisation services, general practices or primary health networks, Aboriginal healthcare services, or other immunisation providers.

Why is immunisation important?

Immunisation uses the body's natural defence mechanism – the immune response – to build resistance to specific infectious diseases. Immunisation is one of the most effective strategies to protect children and adults against certain diseases (called 'vaccine preventable diseases').

For most vaccine preventable diseases, immunisation not only protects individuals but also others in their community by increasing the level of immunity such that when a large percentage of people in the population are immunised against a specific disease, it becomes harder for that disease to spread. This concept is known as 'herd immunity'.

Vaccine preventable diseases can be serious and although side effects can occur from immunisation, the benefits of immunisation far outweigh the risks from the diseases they prevent.

Why is it important for all children to be immunised?

Immunisation provides direct protection against vaccine preventable diseases for an immunised child. In addition, for many vaccine preventable diseases, if most children are immunised, immunisation indirectly protects people who are unable to be immunised, by decreasing spread of the disease. Some people cannot be immunised because they are too young to have some vaccines, or have certain medical conditions.

The more children who are immunised, the greater our ability to control vaccine preventable diseases. Unless there are medical reasons why immunisation cannot be given to a child, all children should be immunised with all the recommended vaccines at the age scheduled to provide the best protection for that child and the community.

Would any changes to State legislation affect Federal Government family assistance payments?

No. Children are already required to be fully immunised for parents to be eligible to receive family assistance payments under the Federal [No Jab, No Pay](#) policy. The applicable immunisations are provided free through the National Immunisation Program.

Are vaccines safe?

The scientific evidence supporting vaccination is overwhelming, and the benefits far outweigh the very rare risks.

Before a vaccine or any medication can be used in Australia it must be licensed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA extensively assesses each vaccine for safety and effectiveness. This assessment is based on scientific evidence.

Vaccines are very safe but like any medication or natural therapy they can have some side effects. These are usually short lasting and do not require special treatment.

Where can I go for more information?

More information, including the Discussion Paper, is available on the [YourSAy website](#).

How can the community provide feedback?

We are seeking your feedback on the options proposed in the Discussion Paper.

You can join the conversation by:

- > Joining the [online discussion](#)
- > Completing the [online survey](#)
- > Making a submission to HealthCommunicableDiseases@sa.gov.au or
Communicable Disease Control Branch, PO Box 6, Rundle Mall SA 5000.

Submit your feedback by **5pm Friday 28 June 2019**.

For more information

**Communicable Disease Control Branch
Health Regulation & Protection
Department for Health and Wellbeing
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