

Doctors' Voice

March/April 2014

Secondary school immunisation – information for parents

Secondary school students in Victoria are eligible to receive free immunisations to ensure their continued protection against preventable diseases.

Why are immunisations needed?

Adolescence is an important age to have a booster dose of vaccine. The protection from some immunisations given to children gradually disappears over time so needs to be boosted. The government also funds some vaccines especially for adolescents because they are at an age when the vaccine will be most effective, providing protection before they can be exposed to a disease in later adolescence or adulthood.

Immunisation is a proven and safe way to be protected against diseases which cause serious illness and sometimes death. Immunisation not only protects the person having the vaccine, but can protect other people around them who cannot be immunised due to illness or age.

When are immunisations given in school?

Every year adolescents in Year 7 and Year 10 of all secondary schools in Victoria are offered the appropriate free vaccines. Adolescents who do not attend mainstream schools are still eligible for free immunisation and should contact their doctor, practice nurse, a medical centre or their local council immunisation service in the year they are due so they do not miss out.

Adolescents must have the vaccine at the targeted age to be eligible for free immunisation. If the vaccine is part of a course and the course is not finished in that year, the adolescent has until the end of the next year to finish the course of vaccine for free. After this time the vaccine must be purchased on prescription.

Who will give the immunisations?

Each year local councils arrange dates to visit the schools and hold immunisation sessions. If you prefer your child to have immunisations at the doctor it is important to return the consent card declining the immunisation at the school.

Inform the medical centre that you are attending for the scheduled school immunisation. The vaccines are free but your doctor may charge you for the consultation.

Ref: www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation

Wellbeing

Wellbeing is not just the absence of disease or illness. It is a complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health factors.

Wellbeing is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction. In short, wellbeing could be described as how you feel about yourself and your life.

The factors that influence wellbeing are interrelated e.g. a job provides not just money but purpose, goals, friendships and a sense of belonging.

Wealth is not the key

Money is linked to wellbeing, because having enough money improves living conditions and increases social status. However, happiness may increase with income but only to a point. Many people believe that wealth is a fast track to happiness. But it's not true.

Various international studies have shown that it is the quality of our personal relationships, not the size of our bank balance, which has the greatest effect on our state of wellbeing.

Where to get help:

- your doctor
- family and friends
- Counselor
- Lifeline Tel: 131 114
- Kids Help Line Tel: 1800 551 800
- Mental Health Advice Line
Tel: 1300 280 737

For more information on how to achieve wellbeing and more, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Doctors' Voice

Eczema explained

Eczema in children is a non-contagious skin condition. It usually appears in early childhood and disappears around six years of age. It is sometimes called atopic dermatitis. The skin becomes dry, cracked and itchy, and may weep. Eczema can vary in severity and alter on a daily basis. In some cases, eczema may continue into childhood.

Eczema symptoms may flare up or subside from day to day. This is part of the condition and is not caused by bad care.

Causes are unknown

The causes are unknown but some things seem to make it more likely to appear:

- A family history of eczema, asthma or hay fever
- Occasionally when travelling to other climates or countries
- Some children get rashes after eating particular food
- Mites in house dust, plant pollens, pets, foods, chemicals and clothing materials might provoke or inflame eczema

How to manage eczema

There are ways to alleviate the child's distress. It will help if you:

- Gain the child's cooperation
- Try to prevent scratching (by distracting the child)
- Get to know your child's responses to environmental conditions
- Read about the condition
- Educate others to be sympathetic (siblings, friends, relatives)
- Reduce associated stress for you and your child.

Keep the skin moist

- Moisturisers can be used as often as necessary
- Use moisturizers or bath oil instead of soap in bath and shower
- Apply cool moisturizing cream (keep in 'frige) before bed
- Sorbolen and Aquasol are common moisturizing creams
- Use moisturiser before and after swimming

Medicines and creams

- Doctors may prescribe a range of creams:
- Cortisone-based creams can control eczema
- Different strength creams may be prescribed
- If bacteria infect lesions, antibiotics may be needed
- Medication to relieve itching may be required

For help, contact your doctor or Maternal and Child Health Nurse

For further information visit: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Influenza vaccination

Influenza is a lot more serious than the common cold – it is a very contagious viral illness which is spread through the air from a cough or a sneeze. Symptoms are usually like a very severe cold with added muscle aches, fever and weakness. Most people get over the flu in a week or two but some people get complications which can require admission to hospital. In the most severe case it can even be life threatening.

The influenza vaccine is recommended and FREE for those who are:

- 65 years of age and over
- Pregnant women
- Indigenous people from 15 years of age
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- All people from six months of age and over with conditions predisposing to severe influenza:
- Heart disease
- Chronic respiratory conditions
- Other chronic illnesses requiring regular medical follow-up or hospitalisations
- Chronic neurological conditions
- Impaired immunity
- Long term aspirin therapy in children

Why do I need to have it every year?

The flu virus changes constantly and to make it effective so does the vaccine – the current vaccine protects you against the strain that is about to arrive as well as the swine flu which has been with us for some time now. You cannot catch the flu from the vaccine, as it contains no living organisms. Your doctor will discuss possible side effects with you at the time of vaccination.

For further information visit:

www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/fact-sheets

If you have any ideas for topics, please speak to your GP or Practice Nurse