

Media release**27 May 2003**

Major vaccination program helps prevent meningococcal disease

A new vaccine against meningococcal type C disease is now being used in mass vaccination programs across Australia.

"The vaccine only protects against type C disease", says Professor Margaret Burgess of the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance of Vaccine Preventable Diseases, at the University of Sydney. "Although it is only useful in type C disease (one third of meningococcal disease in Australia), mass vaccinations have resulted in a prompt reduction of at least 75% in type C disease in the United Kingdom."

Each year in Australia, meningococcal infections (all types) cause between 700 and 800 hospitalisations and between 35 and 40 deaths. Ten of these deaths are children under four years of age. During 2001 there were approximately 3.5 cases per 100 000 population, but the rate in indigenous people is nearly six times higher.

A mass immunisation program has been included in the Australian Standard Vaccination Schedule for all children reaching the age of one year. During 2003 the vaccine will also be offered in a catch-up program to children aged one to five years and to senior high school children in a school-based program. The remaining school age children will also have the opportunity to receive the vaccine.

Professor Burgess concluded that the community must understand that this program will not prevent all cases, but it will save some children and young people every year.

In the same issue of *Australian Prescriber* Dr Bill Lyndon, University of Sydney, examines withdrawal of useful drugs from the market and Dr Suzanne Hill of Newcastle University writes about hypertension.

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