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| Immunisation for children in out-of-home care |
| Information for carers  |

## What you need to know

* Children living in out-of-home care are often behind with their immunisations
* Carers can give an immunisation provider (General Practitioner (GP) or local council immunisation provider) permission to give vaccines to a child in their care, if a child specific **instrument of authorisation** that includes routine medical carehas been provided by Child Protection or a copy of the DHHS **standard authorisation** has been provided by the Community Service Organisation (CSO). Take a copy of this to the appointment.
* *Mature minor[[1]](#footnote-1) consent* may be used if the Immunisation Provider deems an adolescent can provide their own valid consent for vaccination.
* To enrol in childcare, a child must have an up to date *Immunisation History Statement*. A copy can be provided by an Immunisation Provider.
* Pre-school children in out-of-home care are eligible for the ‘Grace period’, which allows the child to enrol and commence in childcare or kindergarten whilst documentation is accessed or catch-up vaccines are initiated. Further information regarding the ‘[Grace period eligibility](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/formsandtemplates/grace-period-eligibility-assessment-form)’
* Centrelink family payments may stop if a child is not up to date with vaccinations

Talk about immunisation at the child’s health check with a GP.

**Why is immunisation important?**

Immunisation is an essential part of health care. It is considered routine medical care. It protects those people who have been vaccinated, and also protects those in our community who may be unable to receive vaccines themselves, by reducing the prevalence and spread of disease.

## Immunisation at the health check

All children living in out-of-home care settings should have a health check with a GP within one month of entering care, and every year thereafter. Here are some things you might want to consider to make sure immunisation is addressed:

* When you take a child to a GP for a health check, ask for a long appointment
* The GP practice can check the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) to look at the child’s immunisation history
* If you have been authorised to consent to routine medical care as a result of being issued with a child specific instrument of authorisation from the Child Protection Practitioner (CPP) or the standard authorisation from yourCSO, take a copy of this authorisation to the GP appointment as evidence of your authority to consent to immunisations for the child
* *Mature minor consent* may be used if the Immunisation Provider deems an adolescent can provide their own valid consent for vaccination.

Refer to the Department of Education and Training policy <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/mature-minors-and-decision-making/policy>

* The GP practice can provide free immunisations and can also tell you if and when more vaccines are due
* Be aware that a separate appointment to follow up with catch-up immunisations might be needed – make this appointment before you leave the clinic
* A GP can determine if there is a medical reason for why a child can’t be fully immunised. The GP will complete a medical contraindication form for AIR. (This information should also be noted on the child’s case file by the case manager)
	+ If you have any questions or concerns about immunisation, ask the GP.

## Immunisation requirements for benefits and payments

To receive Family Tax and Child Care Benefits all children and young adults (up to the age of 20 years) need to be up to date with their immunisations under the National Immunisation Program or have a medical exemption.

These vaccinations must be recorded on the AIR. The GP or immunisation nurse giving the vaccine does this. If vaccinations are overdue, Centrelink payments may stop until the child’s vaccinations are up to date.

### When is vaccination required and where can I get the child in my care vaccinated?

* Immunisations routinely occur at 2,4,6,12 and 18 months of age, 4 years of age and in Year 7 and 10 of secondary school. If any of these schedule points are missed, children require an age appropriate catch-up of overdue vaccines.
* A GP or local council immunisation service can provide these vaccines for free and determines a vaccination catch-up plan for children under 20 years of age which may take several visits to complete.

### How do I know if the child in my care is up to date with their immunisations?

No matter what the age of the child or young person in your care, it is important to know if their immunisations are up to date.

A GP can access the AIR at the child’s initial health check and determine the child’s immunisation status. Local council immunisation services can also review a child’s immunisation status on AIR to determine if a child is overdue and commence a catch-up immunisation plan.

**Consent for Immunisations**

**I have a child specific instrument of authorisation or standard authorisation**

* If you have been authorised to consent to certain decisions for the child, and have been issued with a child specific instrument of authorisation from child protection or standard authorisation from a CSO, you must take a copy of this authorisation to the immunisation appointment as evidence of your authority to consent to immunisations for the child (vaccines are considered to be ‘routine medical care’) OR

**I don’t have a child specific instrument of authorisation or standard authorisation**

* If a child specific instrument of authorisation from child protection or a standard authorisation from a CSO has not been issued, you cannot give consent to provide childhood immunisations for a child in your care, but the CPP or CSO likely can. Talk to the CPP or CSO about giving consent for immunisations.
* *Mature minor consent* may be used if the Immunisation Provider deems an adolescent can provide their own valid consent for vaccination.

Refer to the Victorian Education Department guideline <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/mature-minors-and-decision-making/policy>

### What if I need to enrol the child in childcare or school?

### Childcare or kindergarten: In Victoria, to enrol a child in childcare or kindergarten, you must provide a document that shows the child:

* is fully vaccinated for their age, or
* is on a recognised catch-up schedule, if the child has fallen behind with their vaccinations, or
	+ has a medical reason not to be vaccinated.

The document to provide is an *Immunisation History Statement* from the AIR. Children in out-of-home care are eligible for the ‘Grace period’, which allows the child to enrol and commence in childcare or kindergarten whilst documentation is accessed or catch-up vaccines are initiated. Further information regarding the ‘[Grace period eligibility](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/publications/formsandtemplates/grace-period-eligibility-assessment-form)’

#### You can also ask the CPP or CSO to get a copy of the *Immunisation History Statement* for you directly from the AIR.

#### Primary school: By law, in Victoria, you must provide a *School Entry Immunisation Status Certificate* to enrol a child in primary school. An *Immunisation History Statement* from the AIR can be used to enrol a child at school. The child does not need to be fully immunised to enrol in primary school. The statement shows which immunisations a child has received prior to starting school.

The school keeps a copy of the statement and in the event of a disease outbreak, unimmunised children or children who have not presented a statement can be quickly identified and excluded from attending school until the risk of infection has passed.

#### Secondary school: In Victoria, to enrol a child in secondary school you do not need any special immunisation documentation. In Year 7(or at age 12 to 13 years) and Year 10 (or aged 15 to 16 years), vaccinations are offered free to students.

If the child in your care is enrolled in Year 7 or Year 10 of secondary school, look out for the vaccine consent booklet coming home. If you have been issued with an instrument of authorisation, sign and return the consent booklet to the child’s secondary school. If you do not have an instrument of authorisation, check with the CPP or CSO about who is to sign the vaccine consent booklet.

If an adolescent is not attending secondary school, they can receive the vaccines from a GP, local council community immunisation service or some Pharmacists (for limited vaccines from 15 years of age).

Regardless of the age of the child in your care, it is important to determine if they are overdue for any vaccines. Catch-up vaccines can be provided for free to all children and adolescents in Victoria under 20 years of age.

## For further information about vaccinations

* Speak to the child protection practitioner or case manager
* Speak to a GP or a local council immunisation service
* Visit the Better Health Channel at www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

To receive this publication in an accessible format, phone 1300 761 874, using the National Relay Service (phone 133 677) if required, or email immunisation@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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1. young people can be deemed to be able to provide consent for their own treatment if they meet the ‘mature minor’ or ‘Gillick principle’. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)