

Media Release

The Hon Jill Hennessy MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services



Getting Things Done.
Making Things Fair.

Saturday, 24 February, 2018

FREE FLU VACCINATIONS TO PROTECT VICTORIAN KIDS

The Andrews Labor Government will take action to protect Victorian children from the next flu season after Malcolm Turnbull and the Federal Liberals left our kids in the cold.

Minister for Health Jill Hennessy today announced the \$3.5 million program, ensuring all Victorian families with children aged six months to five can have their kids vaccinated from May – before the peak flu season begins.

The Labor Government has urged Malcolm Turnbull and Federal Minister for Health Greg Hunt to expand the National Immunisation Program to vulnerable groups including children – but the Liberals haven't listened. Our program will ensure more than 385,000 kids can be immunised against the flu this year, at GPs or community health services.

Last year, Victoria experienced one of the state's worst ever flu seasons, and children weren't immune. In total, there were more than 3,941 reports of children hit by the flu – compared with 871 the year prior.

This puts enormous strain on Victoria's busy hospitals – and puts our kids at risk – but despite our calls for Malcolm Turnbull and the Liberals to include children in the national program, the Liberals haven't budged.

In addition, Malcolm Turnbull and the Liberals have declared they'll short-change our hospitals again, leaving health services \$2.1 billion behind what's required to meet demand over the five years of the proposed new health agreement. That's 6,954 fewer doctors, 16,586 fewer nurses or 333,990 fewer surgeries.

And to make matters worse, Matthew Guy refuses to stand up to his mate Malcolm Turnbull when he cuts and short-changes Victorian hospitals, and is proposing a half-baked plan that would see more than 180,000 kids miss out on vital immunisations.

The Labor Government also announced it would provide a vaccine for Meningococcal ACWY to Victorian teens in Year 10 of secondary school, as well as young people aged 15-16 years not in secondary school. This is the second year we've had to step in to provide the vaccine, while the Turnbull Government continues to shirk its responsibilities and put children at risk.

That's what you get from the Liberals when it comes to childhood vaccination. The previous Liberal Government cruelly cut the Parents' Whooping Cough vaccine, prompting a spike in whooping cough cases. The Labor Government reinstated the vital life-saving program.

The flu is the greatest cause of hospitalisation in children, and causes more severe illnesses or deaths of Australians than all other infectious diseases combined.

We continue to call on the Federal Liberal Government to add flu vaccines for children to the National Immunisation Program. This is a national problem that needs a national solution. It shouldn't be left to states to do the work of the Federal Government.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Jill Hennessy

"We're ensuring kids aged under five can access a free flu vaccination before another deadly flu season starts – and we'll keep pressuring Malcolm Turnbull and the Liberals to protect Victorian kids permanently."

"Victorians were hit hard by last year's flu season, and kids weren't immune. If Malcolm Turnbull and the Liberals won't protect our kids from the threat of the flu, we will."

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