



7.2 Immunisation and vaccination

Immunisation is a safe and effective way to protect against harmful communicable diseases and, at the population level, prevent the spread of these diseases among the community. In Australia, routine immunisation begins at birth, and includes vaccines against 17 diseases, including measles, mumps and whooping cough (Department of Health 2018b).

The Australian Government funds a range of vaccinations for eligible people under the Immunise Australia Program. The influenza vaccine, for example, is available, for free, to pregnant women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people aged 65 and over, and people who are medically at risk and thus more likely to experience complications from influenza. Additional vaccines may also be funded through state and territory programs, through the workplace and bought privately by prescription.

For immunisation to have the greatest benefit, a large proportion of the community must be fully immunised. In the past, target coverage rates have been around 90%, with these rates for children being largely achieved. However, due to a higher level of vaccine coverage needed to achieve community immunity for measles, an aspirational national immunisation target has been set at 95% of all children to be fully immunised (Department of Health 2018a).

Childhood immunisation rates

All Australian children are expected to have received specific immunisations by a certain age according to the National Immunisation Program Schedule. Fully immunised status is measured at ages 1, 2 and 5 and means that a child has received all the scheduled vaccinations appropriate for their age.

In 2016, the immunisation rate for all children aged 1 was 93.4%; it was 91.4% for 2-year olds and 93.2% for 5-year-olds.

For Indigenous children in 2016, the national immunisation rates for children aged 1 and 2 were lower than the rates for all children. In contrast, the immunisation rate for 5-year-old Indigenous children was higher than the rate for all children (95.2% compared with 93.2%) (Table 7.2.1).

Table 7.2.1: Proportion of children assessed as fully immunised (per cent), by age, 2016

	Age		
	1	2	5
All children	93.4	91.4	93.2
Indigenous children	91.2	89.1	95.2

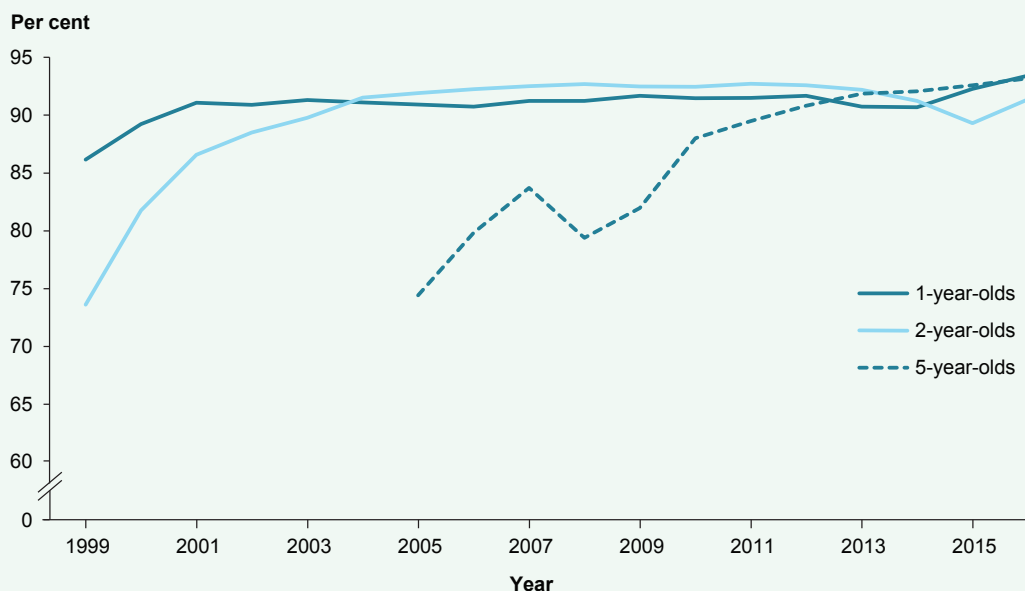
Source: Department of Health 2017.



Figure 7.2.1 presents the immunisation rates for children aged 1 and 2 from 1999 to 2016 and for children aged 5 from 2005 to 2016. It shows that the immunisation rate for:

- 1-year-olds remained relatively stable between 2001 and 2012. The slight fall in the rate for 2013 and 2014 may have been due to a change in the definition of 'fully immunised'
- 2-year-olds increased markedly from 1999 to 2004 and remained relatively stable above 90% until 2013. Changes in the definition of 'fully immunised', made in 2014, may have contributed to the drop in 2015
- 5-year-olds increased from 74.4% in 2005 to 93.2% in 2016. Children who have had catch-up immunisations are included as 'fully immunised' even if they were not fully immunised when they were aged 1 or 2.

Figure 7.2.1: Immunisation rates for children aged 1, 2 and 5, 1999 to 2016



Source: Department of Health 2017; Table S7.2.1.

Human Papillomavirus immunisation rates

A national Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination program (using the quadrivalent HPV vaccine, which protects against four types of HPV) was introduced for school-aged girls in 2007 and extended to boys in 2013. From 2018, a new vaccine will be introduced, protecting against nine types of HPV. Of young people turning 15 in 2016, around 79% of girls and nearly 73% of boys were fully immunised against HPV (NHVPR 2017).



What is missing from the picture?

Until now there has been no regular and nationally consistent source of data with which to estimate vaccination coverage in adolescents and adults. Population surveys have previously been used to estimate vaccination coverage in the adult population or in selected population groups.

The Australian Immunisation Register is a national register that details all funded vaccinations and most privately purchased vaccines given to individuals of all ages who live in Australia. It was set up in 1996 as the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register and renamed following its expansion in 2016. Adult vaccination data captured in the register will be reported when reliable estimates can be obtained (Department of Human Services 2017).

Where do I go for more information?

Australia generally has high immunisation rates, which have increased steadily over time; however, variation still exists across local areas. More information on immunisation at the local level is available at <www.myhealthycommunities.gov.au>.

More information on the Immunise Australia Program is available at <www.immunise.health.gov.au>.

References

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