To have a centre in which all children and staff are fully immunised against all harmful early childhood diseases. To provide protection to the children, staff and families attending the centre against diseases within the community.

EXPLANATION

The NSW Parliament recently amended the Public Health Act 2010 and the changes take effect on 1 January 2014. The Preschool must ensure our enrolment procedures comply with this legislation. The NSW Government has published Frequently Asked Questions about the change, which parents are encouraged to read (Attachment A).

Immunisation is the safest and most effective way of providing protection against early childhood diseases. After immunisation, children are far less likely to catch the diseases if there are cases within the community. If enough people in the community are immunised, the infections can no longer be spread from person to person and the disease dies out altogether.

The Pre-School’s first priority is to keep our staff and children safe, but we must also consider the safety and wellbeing of the families of our students, pregnant mothers and newborn babies in particular, who have a higher risk of infection if a child contracts an infectious disease at the Pre-School.

The Pre-School owes a duty of care to all staff and students. There is increasing evidence to suggest staff working in pre-schools and childcare centres are at a greater risk of catching and/or transmitting infectious diseases. Early childhood professionals are encouraged to be up-to-date with all the vaccinations that are recommended for adults, including vaccinations recommended due to increased risk of exposure in the workplace, for example; Hepatitis A & B, HIB, Annual flu vaccines, etc.

IMPLEMENTATION

⇒ Linked to ACECQA National Quality Framework, meets ACECQA Quality Area Standard: 2.1, Element 2.1.4, Standard: 2.3, Element 2.3.3
⇒ Education and Care Services National Regulation Part 4.2 Children’s Health and Safety, Section 89—First aid Kits
Before enrolment of a student will be offered or confirmed, all families must provide a copy of each child’s Immunisation History Statement to the Director or Administrator.

Parents have the responsibility to provide an updated copy of each child’s Immunisation History Statement (ie. an updated version after the child receives their 3 1/2—4 year old shots, as per the Australian Childhood Immunisation Schedule).

The Pre-School will frequently remind families to provide current copies of the child’s Immunisation History Statement after vaccines are given. The Preschool will not enrol children without proof of immunisation in accordance with the Immunisation Schedule. Medical and religious exemptions may be considered in the absolute discretion of the Director.

The Pre-School is obliged by law to exclude non-immunised children from the Pre-School if an incidence of any communicable disease occurs for the period of time.

**IMMUNISATION FOR STAFF**

Immunisation of staff in the children’s services is important to minimise the risk of contracting a disease that can be prevented by vaccines. Staff should be encouraged to talk to the GP about vaccinations before commencing work in a children’s service.

**The Pre-school will:**

- Maintain a current record of vaccination status of all students and employees. All information will be kept confidential.
- Provide current information on vaccine-preventable diseases to employees and parents.
- Plan and provide, periodic educational sessions on infectious diseases and immunisation for all employees.

The Australian Immunisation Handbook, (9th Edition, 2008, p.105) recommends that people working with children obtain the following vaccinations:

- MMR (measles) – if not immune;
- Varicella (chicken pox) – if sero negative;
- Pertussis – whooping cough
- DTPa vaccine (diphtheria, tetanus, whooping) as a booster provided they have previously received a full course of vaccination for diphtheria and tetanus.
- Hepatitis A (recommended for child care staff, particularly those who care for children who are not toilet trained)
- Annual Flu (influenza) Vaccination

(See Infection Control Guidelines, NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC), Occupational Health and Safety Directorate, retrieved from DEC intranet site on June 2013:

Immunisation & Infectious Disease Issues for Pregnant Child Care Staff

The centre will minimise the risk of and manage exposure of pregnant child care staff to infectious diseases transmitted from children in their care and preventing illness and other risks from vaccine preventable diseases by appropriate immunisation.

Child care staff are exposed to a number of infectious diseases transmitted from children in their care and other people they come into contact with. Child care staff can be immunised against many infectious diseases and there are immunisation and other infection control recommendation strategies specific to child care staff. Pregnant child care staff are also at risk of specific infectious diseases that can have adverse impacts on pregnancy and there are active steps that they can take to reduce this risk.

Relevant Legislation: Centre Based and Mobile Child Care Services Regulation (No.2) 1996 (NSW); Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000 and Regulations 2001 (NSW).


The Authorised Supervisor will:

- Provide information to all staff in the centre on current recommended immunisations for child care staff in accordance with current Australian Standard Vaccination Schedule and the current edition of the Australian Immunisation Handbook (also see Section 16.3 Child Care Staff Immunisation and Infectious Disease Issues).

- Recommend to female centre staff that they seek advice from their local doctor about immunisation needs before planning pregnancy.

- Advise all staff before commencing work that the above recommendations for immunisation will minimise transmission and risks of those infectious diseases in children and staff and if a staff member has concerns about these diseases or immunisations they should seek advice from their doctor before commencing work.
Advise all staff that if an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease occurs in the centre, staff should inform the centre director if they are not immunised against that disease. Unimmunised staff should consult their doctor to determine if it is appropriate for them not to attend work during the outbreak and discuss any issues relating to their immunisation or other medical management.

If a pregnant centre staff member is unsure whether they have had any of the recommended immunisations, advise them to discuss their immunisation needs with their doctor.

**OBTAINING YOUR CHILD’S IMMUNISTION HISTORY STATEMENT**

Please note that ‘Blue books’ are not accepted as evidence of immunisation. A copy of the Immunisation History Statement, issued by the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register, will need to be given to the Pre-School prior to enrolment (or the international equivalent, if the child was immunised overseas).

Parents will receive an Immunisation History Statement in the mail after their child has completed their 18 month and 3½ - 4 year old vaccinations. Please bring this to the Pre-School as soon as you receive it.

A copy of an Immunisation History Statement can also be obtained at any time:
- by calling the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register on **1800 653 809**
- by requesting a statement by emailing acir@medicareaustralia.gov.au
- by visiting the local Department of Human Services Service Centre, Medicare Office or Centrelink office.

**Sources**

**Developed:** 2006
**Reviewed:** Oct 13, Mar 15
Vaccination: Questions & Answers for Parents

- Immunisation Programs Currently selected
- NSW School-Based Immunisation Program 2013
- School Based Vaccination Program (community languages)
- Occupational Assessment, Screening & Vaccination
- Vaccine Order Forms
- Enrolling Children in Child Care Centres and Primary Schools from 1 January 2014
- Changes to the immunisation schedule from 1 July 2013
- Whooping Cough

Strengthening vaccination requirements for child care centres

The Public Health Amendment (Vaccination of Children Attending Child Care Facilities) Act 2013 will come into force from 1 January 2014.

What do the changes mean?

The changes to the Public Health Act will mean that a child’s vaccination status must be provided to a child care centre before enrolment.

Parents or guardians will need to provide evidence when applying to enrol their child in a child care centre that their child:

- is fully vaccinated for their age, or;
- has a medical reason not to be vaccinated, or;
- has a conscientious objection, including religious beliefs, to vaccination or;
- is on a recognised catch-up schedule if their child has fallen behind with their vaccinations.

How is this different to what is happening now?

At the moment, a child care centre needs to request a vaccination record. The changes will mean that a child care centre must obtain a document showing a child is up to date with vaccination or that they have a valid exemption before enrolment.
The stricter document requirements will:
- make sure that parents and guardians have seriously considered vaccination and discussed it with an immunisation provider;
- help prompt parents and guardians who have forgotten to keep their child’s immunisations up to date; and
- make sure the child care centre has accurate information about which children have not been vaccinated in case there are cases of a vaccine preventable disease at the centre and preventive measures are required.

Why is it important for children to be vaccinated?
Vaccination is the best way to protect a child from serious disease. If most children are vaccinated this also protects those who are too young to be vaccinated, or those who can’t be vaccinated because of medical conditions.

The more people who vaccinate their children, the greater our ability to control serious vaccine preventable diseases.

For effective disease control, 95% immunisation coverage is needed. In NSW around 90% of children at 1 and 2 years of age are fully immunised. However in some areas of NSW the immunisation rates are much lower, putting these areas at much greater risk of outbreaks of diseases such as measles and whooping cough.

The following areas of NSW have less than 85% coverage in some age groups:
- Sydney Inner City
- Eastern Suburbs - North
- North Sydney - Mosman
- Manly
- Blue Mountains
- South Coast
- Kempsey - Nambucca
- Richmond Valley - Coastal
- Richmond Valley - Hinterland

Children whose parents choose not to vaccinate are also placing at risk those children who are medically unfit to be vaccinated or those who are too young to be vaccinated.

Which vaccines must a child have to be fully vaccinated?
The NSW Immunisation Schedule (click here) sets out the age-appropriate vaccines for children.
Does this mean that vaccinations are compulsory?
It is the parent’s or guardian’s choice whether to vaccinate their child.

The stricter requirements are being introduced so that parents are prompted to keep their child’s vaccinations up to date, are encouraged to talk about vaccinations with their doctor or immunisation nurse, and to enable child care centres to respond more quickly in the event of a vaccine preventable disease outbreak.

Will an unvaccinated child still be able to go to child care?
Children who are unvaccinated for medical or conscientious reasons, or are behind on their immunisation schedule, will still be able to be enrolled in child care provided that the appropriate document has been provided.

Will these proposed changes make a difference if unvaccinated children will still be able to go to child care?
While around 90% of children at 1 and 2 years of age in NSW are fully immunised, 95% coverage is needed for effective disease control. This is called “herd immunity” or “community immunity”. It means that if most people in the community are vaccinated, then those children who can’t be vaccinated for medical reasons or are too young to be vaccinated, are less likely to come into contact with someone who has the disease.

Less than 2% of children have parents who are conscientious objectors. Children who are medically unfit for vaccination also only represent a small percentage. This means that if the rest of the community are immunised on time an effective level of disease control will be achieved.

If a child is immunised, what document will be needed to enroll in child care?
A copy of the Immunisation History Statement, issued by the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register, will need to be given to the child care facility prior to enrolment.

What if a child can’t be vaccinated for medical reasons?
Some children can’t have some vaccines due to severe allergy. Other children can’t have specific vaccines due to illness, such as HIV or other severe immune problems. If they are otherwise well enough to attend child care these changes will not prevent children with medical contraindications to vaccination enrolling in child care.

Parents/guardians of children with medical contraindications will need to ask their GP, pediatrician or immunisation nurse to complete the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register Immunisation Exemption Medical Contraindication Form (IMMU11), lodge the form with Medicare, and provide them with a copy so that they can present this to the child care facility where they seek to enroll.
What if a child is behind on their immunisations?

Vaccinating children on time is a high priority, as this gives them the earliest protection against serious vaccine preventable diseases. Minor coughs and colds are not a reason to delay vaccination.

Parents/guardians should strive to keep their children up to date. The new app “Save the Date to Vaccinate” can help parents get their kids vaccinated on time.

If children are behind when the time comes to enroll, parents/guardians will need to have a consultation with an immunisation provider and commence on a certified catch-up schedule, using the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register Immunisation History form. This is a triplicate form that must be lodged with Medicare by their doctor/immunisation provider. A copy must be given to the parent so that they can present this to the childcare centre on enrolment.

What will conscientious objectors have to do?

If a child is unvaccinated and the parent or guardian seeks to enroll them in child care they must first have a consultation with an immunisation provider. The immunisation provider must explain the benefits and risks associated with immunisation to the not parent or guardian of the child, and inform him/her of the potential dangers if a child is immunised. The doctor/immunisation provider and the parent/guardian must sign the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register Immunisation Exemption Conscientious Objection Form (IMMU12), and lodge it with the parent or guardian of the child, and inform him/her of the potential dangers if a child is Australian Childhood Immunisation Register. A copy must be provided to the parent so that they can present this to the childcare centre on enrolment.

If a child is unvaccinated and there is an outbreak of a vaccine preventable disease at their child care centre, they may be sent home during the period that they would be at risk, or that their presence would be a risk to other children.