

VACCINE PREVENTABLE DISEASES AND VACCINATION COVERAGE IN AUSTRALIA, 1999–2000

In 2002, the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance of Vaccine Preventable Diseases (NCIRS) prepared the second comprehensive report on the epidemiology of vaccine preventable diseases and vaccination coverage in Australia. The report reviews the most recently available data about notifications (1999–2000), hospitalisations (1998–99 to 1999–00), and deaths (1998–2000), for diseases targeted by the Australian Standard Vaccination Schedule in 2000 (measles, mumps, pertussis, diphtheria, tetanus, rubella, Hib disease, hepatitis B, influenza, and polio), as well as four other vaccine preventable diseases that were not on the schedule in 2000 (varicella, hepatitis A, pneumococcal disease, and meningococcal disease). Recent trends in vaccination coverage using data from the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) are also reported. The second report provides an update of, and comparison with, the data presented in the first report (1993–1998).

There were continued declines in notification rates for Hib disease, measles, and rubella. These diseases are now close to being eliminated in Australia. Pertussis remained the most commonly notified disease preventable by childhood vaccination. Influenza accounted for the highest number of hospitalisations and deaths of any vaccine preventable disease. In the review period, vaccination coverage targets reached those set by the *Immunise Australia Program*.

This report is a valuable resource for health professionals. It provides evidence of the effect of recent and ongoing initiatives in disease control and a baseline against which further changes can be measured. The report was published by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing as a supplement of *Communicable Diseases Intelligence* (May 2002). Printed copies can be obtained by contacting the NCIRS by telephone on (02) 9845 3069, or by fax on (02) 9845 3082. Electronic copies can be downloaded from the website at www.cda.gov.au/cdihtml.htm.

IMMUNISATION COVERAGE: AUSTRALIA 2001

During 2001, the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance of Vaccine Preventable Diseases (NCIRS) conducted five studies to examine the true level of immunisation coverage in Australia compared with Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR) data, and the effect of the *Immunise Australia Program* initiatives on coverage. Each study involved a nationally representative survey of children selected from the ACIR. Information was obtained from parents by computer-assisted telephone interviews.

The five studies, which are presented as discrete chapters in the report *Immunisation Coverage: Australia 2001*, are:

- the accuracy of the ACIR in estimating coverage at 12 and 24 months of age;
- the validity of the 'third-dose assumption' to estimate coverage;
- immunisation coverage in inner urban areas;
- the influence of parent incentive payments on immunisation;
- measles vaccine coverage in 5-year old children.

The findings of the five studies demonstrate that: overall, high immunisation coverage for vaccines due in the first two years of life has been achieved in Australia, with 94 per cent for receipt of all scheduled vaccines due before 12 months, and 90 per cent for those due before 24 months of age (both estimates are higher than those calculated from ACIR data); the 'third-dose assumption' is valid and necessary to prevent underestimation of immunisation coverage; lower coverage estimates for inner urban areas of Australia's capital cities are more a result of under-reporting to the ACIR than underimmunisation; linkage of immunisation status to parent payments (the maternity allowance and the child care benefit) has encouraged both uptake and timeliness of immunisation; as Australia approaches measles elimination, 93 per cent of 5-year-old children were estimated to be immune to measles through vaccination (which is adequate, at a national level, to prevent sustained measles outbreaks).

The report *Immunisation Coverage: Australia 2001* provides valuable information for immunisation practitioners, researchers, and policy makers. The report was published by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. Printed copies can be obtained by contacting the NCIRS by telephone on (02) 9845 3069, or by fax on (02) 9845 3082. Electronic copies can be downloaded from the website at www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/immunise/report.pdf.