

Immunisation

Information sheet - developed April 2016, updated March 2019



For case workers and health service staff working with refugees and asylum seekers

This information sheet to inform case workers and health service staff in Victoria about immunisation policy and considerations for people of refugee backgrounds.

Key background

- **Catch-up immunisation is an essential part of the post arrival health check for all ages**, and evidence suggests all people who arrive as a refugee or seeking asylum will need catch-up vaccines.
- **Catch-up immunisation generally requires 3 visits over at least 4 months** (4 visits over 10 months for those aged 4-9 years) with several vaccines each visit.
- In Victoria, children can access immunisation with their general practitioner (GP) or at local government services (LGA), and sometimes through LGA English language school outreach programs. Adults can access immunisation with GPs.
- **All refugees and asylum seekers, regardless of age and Medicare status, are [eligible for free age appropriate catch-up vaccines](#).**
- Refugee arrivals will have received vaccines before they arrive in Australia as part of their immigration process. These vaccines are recorded on the HAPLite system. **Overseas vaccines should be recorded on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR)**, which reduces the number of vaccines/catch-up visits. Vaccines in Australia are also recorded on AIR.
- **Vaccination status affects Centrelink payments and enrolment in early childhood education.** In order to receive full Centrelink payments children/young people need to be fully immunised OR on a registered catch-up plan OR have a medical reason for not being fully vaccinated, with their vaccines registered on AIR (see [What are Immunisation Requirements](#)). Refugee entrants (permanent residents) have full Centrelink eligibility, people seeking asylum are not eligible for the same Centrelink payments. There is an exemption for permanent humanitarian visa holders if the child has been in Australia for less than 6 months – however catch-ups should be commenced as soon after arrival as practicable to ensure completion: (see [Immunisation – Approved Exemptions \(FTB\)](#)).

Australian and Victorian government immunisation policy

Children should be up-to-date with their childhood vaccinations OR be on a vaccine catch-up schedule OR have a medical reason for not being fully vaccinated:

- to be eligible to receive family assistance payments from Centrelink ([Child Care Benefit](#), [Child Care Rebate](#) or the full [Family Tax Benefit Part A – FTB-A](#)) – i.e. meet the immunisation requirements for **No Jab No Pay** – Australian legislation. Centrelink uses the AIR record to determine immunisation status. **Children turning 4 years also need to have completed a health check prior to school entry to receive the full FTB-A (see [Healthy Start for School](#)).** *These provisions apply to refugee-background children. Asylum seeker children are not eligible for these payments.*
- in order to enrol in childcare or kindergarten – **No Jab No Play** – Victorian legislation. Families need to provide a copy of their child's AIR Immunisation History Statement. Refugee and asylum seeker children should be enrolled under a 16 week grace period, during which time the childcare or kindergarten should take *reasonable steps* to obtain the child's AIR immunisation history statement (see [16-week grace period for enrolment](#)). Children must also have an immunisation history statement from the Australian Immunisation Register to enrol in primary school. Immunisation providers can print off immunisation history statements for families who have not received the child's history statement from AIR. *These provisions apply to both refugee-background and asylum seeker children.*

Impact on people from refugee backgrounds

Families from refugee backgrounds may need support around immunisation as outlined in the following scenarios:

Scenario 1: Enrolling a newly arrived child from a refugee background in childcare or kindergarten

Problem: No children from refugee backgrounds arrive in Australia fully immunised due to differences between Australian and country of origin immunisation schedules, therefore new arrivals will not be 'up-to-date' when they enrol in childcare or

kindergarten. The Victorian legislation requires children to be up to date OR on a catch-up plan for enrolment to be approved. The Australian legislation requires children to be up to date OR on a catch-up plan (as registered on AIR) OR have a medical exemption to receive family assistance payments, which help support childcare costs.

Solution: Under Victorian policy, children who arrived in Australia as a refugee or asylum seeker are eligible for a 16-week grace period, which allows them to enrol in childcare or kindergarten (regardless of their immunisation status) while they get their vaccinations on track. The family will need to attend a GP or LGA immunisation service for vaccinations, take any records of previous vaccinations to the appointment with them, including offshore health records, and document that they are on a catch-up plan on the AIR, which will also facilitate Centrelink payments for refugee children. Families can obtain their child's AIR record online through their [myGov account](#); by using the Express plus Medicare mobile app or by calling AIR on 1800 653 809. If the family does not have a myGov account, they can create one and link it to their Centrelink online account. They can also use the health provider view of the AIR record. If there are any concerns with enrolment (or if this is declined) contact the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Immunisation Section on 1300 882 008.

Scenario 2: Enrolling a child from a refugee or asylum seeker background in childcare or kindergarten where their immunisation status is unclear or not up to date.

Problem: Some children remain under-immunised in Australia due to difficulties accessing immunisation services, and/or their AIR record does not reflect their vaccinations and does not record them as being up to date. In this scenario, both the Victorian and Australian laws will affect the family as above.

Solution: These children need an assessment of their immunisation status to: clarify their immunisation history, enter information into AIR if it has not been recorded, and provide catch-up vaccines if needed. This can occur at either a GP or LGA immunisation service. They are still eligible for the grace period for childcare/kindergarten and will need to provide their AIR record (either individual or health provider view). If there are any concerns with enrolment (or if this is declined) contact the Victorian DHHS Immunisation Section on 1300 882 008.

Scenario 3: Family have received letters from Centrelink about Family Assistance payments stating the children/young people are un- or under-immunised for their age

Problem: Children/young people in the family are not recorded as being fully immunised on AIR and the family has received letters from Centrelink advising them that they are no longer meet the immunisation requirements for the Child Care Benefit, Child Care Rebate and/or FTB-A.

This can occur because i) they have not had some/all of their vaccines and need catch-up immunisation, or ii) they have had some/all of their catch-up vaccines, but vaccines may not be recorded on AIR. Because the FTB-A extends up to and including 19 years of age, this situation may still occur for families with older children where vaccines were given many years previously.

Solution: These children/young people need an assessment of their immunisation status to: clarify their immunisation history, enter information into AIR if it has not been recorded, and provide catch-up vaccines if needed. This can occur at either their GP or LGA immunisation service. The only way for a family's payments to be reinstated is to ensure any previous vaccines are registered on AIR and/or for the child/young person to commence and go on to complete a recognised catch-up schedule. The family should take any records of previous vaccinations given in Australia or overseas to their immunisation provider. When vaccines are registered on AIR they will be recorded as being on a catch-up plan for Centrelink purposes. The family may need to attend multiple visits to complete the full catch-up program. They will need to attend all of the visits, or they will lose payments again if the next set of catch-up vaccines become overdue.

Scenario 4: No link between Centrelink and AIR records

Problem: Centrelink does not link to Medicare and cannot determine vaccinations recorded on AIR, and the family has received letters from Centrelink asking them to confirm their child's Medicare number and child reference number.

Solution: Check the letter from Centrelink. In some cases, the only requirement might be confirming the child's Medicare number and reference number – in which case you may be able to support the family to do this. The family can do this by logging in to their [myGov account](#) and selecting Centrelink online account\My Profile\immunisation. Alternatively, they can call the AIR Enquiries Line on 1800 653 809.

Medical exemptions

General practitioners, paediatricians, infectious diseases physicians, clinical immunologists or public health physicians can notify medical exemptions. Some children may not have received vaccinations because of medical conditions, or because they are known to be immune to certain diseases. In this situation, one of these medical professionals will need to complete and submit an [AIR Medical Exemption form](#).

Further reading

Further reading can be found here: <http://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/learn/immunisation/>. Specific topics include:

- [No Jab No Pay](#) (Australian government policy)
- [Immunisation requirements](#)
- [Family Tax Benefit Part A eligibility](#)
- [Healthy Start for School](#)
- [Free catch-up vaccines for refugees and humanitarian entrants aged 20 years and older](#)
- [Free catch-up vaccines for refugees and humanitarian entrants aged 10-19 years](#)
- [No Jab No Play](#) (Victorian government policy)

Disclaimer: This information has been compiled by the Victorian Refugee Health Network for case workers and others working with families from refugee backgrounds based on information from the Victorian Department of Health & Human Services and the Commonwealth Department of Health. Every effort has been made to confirm the accuracy of the information (developed April 2016, updated July 2017 and March 2019) but please advise if any amendments are required. Please contact info@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au or the Victorian Refugee Health Network, 03 9389 8900.