

“W” IS FOR WORRY – NEW MENINGOCOCCAL STRAIN STRESSES PARENTS

Parents across Australia are becoming increasingly concerned about a new strain of the deadly meningococcal disease.

“As reported on ABC News, the incidence of meningococcal W is increasing,” said The Parenthood’s Acting Executive Director Nicole Lessio.

Meningococcal W is the deadliest of the five strains of the disease, with the vaccine for meningococcal C the only one currently included on the immunisation register.

“Parents rightly want reassurance from Health Minister Greg Hunt that including the meningococcal W vaccine is in train,” Ms Lessio said.

“The immunisation schedule is designed to prevent death and disability from vaccine-preventable diseases, yet we have no word from the Federal Government on their plan for this deadly strain of meningococcal that a lot of parents might mistakenly think their child is already protected against,” said Ms Lessio.

Minister Hunt stepped in earlier this year, working with GSK to ensure strain B vaccines were more affordable in Australia, but is yet to include those on the immunisation schedule either.

Parents are not expecting vaccines to be added overnight.

“It is understood that adding vaccines to the immunisation register is not a quick or simple thing to achieve. However, parents do need to be reassured that our government is working on keeping their kids safe from preventable disease. At this point, we’ve heard nothing,” said Ms Lessio.

The World Health Organisation publication, *“Principles and considerations for adding a vaccine to a national immunization programme: From decision to implementation and monitoring,”* provides a checklist for adding new vaccines to a nation’s immunisation schedule that considers logistics, training, cost, storage and waste disposal as well as the benefits to residents’ health.

“With suspicion about immunisation effectiveness continuing to be pedalled by self-proclaimed ‘experts’ on the internet, we’re calling on the government to end any confusion by educating the public about this new strain and tells us how they plan to protect our kids from contracting it.

Because, ultimately, doing nothing could be deadly.”

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