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media release

Time to get your child immunised

Hunter New England Health is reminding parents to check that their child has had their booster vaccines, which are due at four years of age.

Busy parents who either did not know or have maybe forgotten the four-year-old vaccines are being urged to check their child's immunisation records prior to the commencement of the new school year.

Hunter New England Health Immunisation Coordinator Dr Christine Carr said childhood diseases can cause serious complications and sometimes death.

"Immunisation is a simple, safe way of protecting children against harmful infections and diseases.

"Immunisation has been responsible for a huge reduction in many serious childhood diseases in recent years. Cases of diphtheria, polio and tetanus and even Hib meningitis have not been seen in NSW for years.

However despite a sharp fall in cases of whooping cough from over 500 in 2006 to 264 in 2007, there have already been 449 cases notified in Hunter New England Health region during 2008.

"Parents should remember these diseases are easily spread from person to person, and when immunisation rates fall the diseases can return," Dr Carr said.

"All children should have two doses of measles-mumps-rubella vaccine by the time they begin school (at one year of age and the other at four years of age).

"It is really important that children receive their boosters as soon as they reach the age of four because they are more at risk of coming into contact with infectious diseases these days because children are much more social.

"Children are often attending playgroups, day-care or pre-school well before they reach school age – and modern families generally have a bigger social calendar than in years gone by," Dr Carr said.

"It is important to protect your child by providing them with safe and effective vaccines against these serious diseases," Dr Carr said.

"A lot of parents nowadays haven't been exposed to the terrible consequences of infectious diseases such as pertussis (whooping cough) or measles or Hib meningitis; this can influence their opinion about the importance of immunisation."

"But they are very real diseases and can be very serious. It is important to keep in mind that the reason we do not currently see many of these infections is because vaccination rates have remained so high in recent years."

Parents should be aware that the adverse reactions after receiving vaccinations are small and last only a short time, and that the benefits of keeping a child safe and healthy far outweighs the very small risk associated with immunisation.

Reactions are no longer common but may include pain and redness at the injection site, and occasionally the child may feel 'off colour', although this is generally only lasts a day or two.