

ACT News

Vaccine doses for teenagers to double

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Thousands more Canberra teenagers than in the past will have a date with a needle under an overhaul of immunisation programs designed to protect young people from disease.

Looking ahead ... Paul Kelly says the vaccine will help protect the boys' future partners. *Photo: Elesa Lee*

Next year will be the first time boys have been included in the Gardasil human papillomavirus (HPV) immunisation program and year 9 vaccinations will be phased out in favour of giving more injections during year 7.

Under current arrangements, year 9 students are offered a diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough) booster in year 9.

But ACT Chief Health Officer Paul Kelly said it had been decided to administer the booster in year 7, along with other vaccines.

"Catch-up" arrangements would be put in place to ensure that older students did not miss out the immunisations as a result of the changes.

"Within a two-year period we'll have the HPV for the entire cohort of boys and girls and the booster of the diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis vaccine will be in year 7," Dr Kelly said.

"There's a bit of a rollback of that so there will be people in year 7 and eight and nine getting the vaccine next year and it will consolidate to the year 7 class over a couple of years."

The changes would lead to an effective doubling in the number of doses of vaccines administered in high schools next year.

The federal government announced in July that the HPV vaccination program would be extended to cover boys.

HPV can lead to genital warts, cervical cancer and other cancers - some of which can effect boys.

Dr Kelly said giving the HPV vaccine to boys would help protect their future partners from an agent that could lead to cervical cancer.

"It makes sense when it's a sexually transmitted disease. If you're only giving it to half the population then it's only half as effective," he said.

Dr Kelly publicly launched on Monday a strategy designed to increase immunisation rates in the ACT and reduce hospital admissions that could have been prevented if patients were vaccinated.

The ACT had extremely high vaccination rates for young children, at well over 90 per cent, but the Health Directorate also wanted to increase the number of adolescents and adults vaccinated against serious illnesses.

Dr Kelly said many parents simply forgot, or never got around to having their children fully immunised. Information from a national immunisation register was used to remind these parents.

"We get the alert that this particular child hasn't had that immunisation and we follow up every single one of those children," he said.

"There's a whole range of reasons why people don't get immunised. There's a very small section of the community who are conscientious objectors and that's their right but mostly it's about not getting around to it or busy lives."

Health authorities want to increase the uptake of the influenza vaccine among certain groups, including people with chronic diseases, pregnant women and people whose spleens have been removed.

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