



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health and Ageing**

CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

Dear Colleagues.

**Re: Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 vaccine now approved for children 6 months to 9 years of age**

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) previously approved the CSL Panvax® H1N1 vaccine for use in adults and children aged 10 years and older as a single 15µg. Since September 30, 2009, over five million doses of vaccine have been distributed to immunisation providers, with 4.2 million doses being distributed to Australian general practitioners. Children aged 6 months to 35 months can receive 7.5µg and children 3 to 9 years can receive 15µg.

The TGA has now approved the pandemic vaccine for usage in children from six months to nine years of age. The TGA has determined that **two doses at least four weeks apart** will be required for children 6 months to 9 years. This will give this group sufficient immunity, although even one dose will give good initial protection from pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza. This recommendation of two doses in children under 10 years is in line with usual flu vaccine practice. I am attaching a fact sheet which provides more information on doses for children under age 10.

Whilst the number of cases of pandemic influenza in Australia waned in spring, the disease remains a major threat to Australia. The number of cases and deaths is increasing from this disease in the northern hemisphere. It is highly likely, with the influx of overseas visitors and returning holiday makers over the summer months, that some arrivals will be infected with the pandemic influenza strain. Our best advice is that a second wave can occur at any time. The northern hemisphere experience also suggests that the flu season may begin early next year.

Whilst pandemic influenza turned out to be a moderate disease overall, it was serious in vulnerable people with underlying medical conditions and in a significant number of otherwise healthy, younger people. Specifically in relation to children, of the 37,269 laboratory-confirmed cases of pandemic influenza recorded in Australia from May to 20 November 2009, 7,263 cases (20%) have been children aged up to 9 years. In the same 7-month period, a total of 1,160 children were hospitalised in Australia with this virus and sadly, 15 children under 10 years of age died in association with H1N1 infection. The highest rate of hospitalisation in our community last winter was in our children.

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Vaccination of all Australians is our best protection against the next wave pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza. Within the next **two to three weeks**, we will provide GPs and other immunisation providers with supplies of pre-filled syringes for usage in children aged 6 to 35 months. These pre-filled syringes contain 7.5 ug HA in 0.25ml, the dose for this age group (attached fact sheet). Children over the age of three can be vaccinated using the multi dose vials (MDVs) at 15ug HA in 0.5ml. The Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (ATAGI) and the TGA have both supported the use of the multi dose vials (MDVs) for all children aged 6 months and above and adults as safe and effective. ATAGI's protocols for the use of vaccine in children are available via the Department's health emergency website ([www.healthemergency.gov.au](http://www.healthemergency.gov.au)) and other websites including the RACGP website.

As you are aware there is ongoing monitoring of the safety of the current vaccination program. Ours is one of the strongest and safest regulatory vaccine frameworks for robust and transparent approval and registration of vaccines. World wide there have been around 60 million vaccinated against pandemic (H1N1) 2009 virus with most programs now including children. The TGA is in contact with regulators around the world and the side-effect profile is consistent with seasonal influenza vaccine.

Many thanks to General Practitioners who have played such a leading role in the provision of pandemic immunisation services. Thank you for continuing this role as we extend the program to children under 10 years of age. Opportunistic vaccinations of a family or through dedicated clinics including practice nurse clinics will be appreciated. We anticipate that encouragement of vaccination of children before the start of the school year will increase uptake of the vaccine.

Further information is available from [www.healthemergency.gov.au](http://www.healthemergency.gov.au), by calling the Pandemic Hotline on 180 2007, or alternatively you can contact the state or territory health department using the contact details included on the Health Emergency website

Yours sincerely



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