

Australia to boost child vaccination with \$20 mn package

April 19 2015

Australia Sunday unveiled a Aus\$26 million (US\$20 million) package to increase child vaccination rates, as it removed a religious exemption allowing parents unwilling to immunise their children to claim some government benefits.

The measures reflect the government's public health concerns amid a debate over immunisation for children, with some parents believing that vaccines against [deadly diseases](#) are themselves dangerous.

Health Minister Sussan Ley said the new measures, which will be part of the May 12 [federal budget](#), included the establishment of a national school vaccination register and [financial incentives](#) for doctors to pursue children two months overdue for their immunisations.

An information campaign involving doctors will also be rolled out to educate parents, she said.

"We need to make sure that the information is available through general practitioners to explain to those parents who are hesitant, who are getting complex and complicated information and, quite honestly, hearing some crackpot ideas about what happens if you vaccinate children," Ley told reporters.

"In fact, what happens is your children maintain immunity from diseases that can either kill or give lifetime difficulties."

Ley said the package was part of a "carrot and stick" approach to immunisation. The government last Sunday said it would block parents who refuse to vaccinate their children from accessing some government benefits.

Social Services Minister Scott Morrison toughened the restrictions Sunday, removing the religious exemption from the "no jab, no pay" policy.

This means that only parents unwilling to vaccinate their children on medical grounds will still be allowed to receive the payments.

Morrison said that after speaking to representatives from the Church of Christ, Scientist, the one religious group that held an exemption, he had removed it.

"Having been informed the religion is not advising members to avoid vaccinating their children... the government no longer sees that the exemption is current," Morrison said in a statement.

"Having resolved this outstanding matter the government will not be receiving nor authorising any further vaccination exemption applications from religious organisations."

Australia has [vaccination rates](#) of over 90 per cent for children aged one to five.

At least 166,000 children were last year recorded as being overdue for their vaccinations for more than two months, Ley said.

More than 39,000 children aged under seven were not vaccinated because of their parents' objections, an increase of more than 24,000 children over the past decade, the government added.

The anti-vaccination movement has coincided with the resurgence of measles, a preventable disease, in some European countries as well as in parts of the United States.

Many people who do not vaccinate their [children](#) say they fear a triple vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella is responsible for increasing cases of autism—a theory repeatedly disproven by various studies.

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