

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Online consent could strengthen vaccination programs in schools

Vaccination programs in schools to maximise the numbers of pupils protected against dangerous diseases could be strengthened by allowing consent to be lodged online instead of through paper forms, and by ensuring schools do a better job of coordinating the immunisations.

A paper in the latest edition of *Public Health Research & Practice*, published today by the Sax Institute, finds a number of parents surveyed anonymously after a catch-up measles vaccination program in NSW in 2014 and 2015 identified online consent processes as one way to streamline immunisation efforts.

In addition, over half of parents (54%) said they had trouble finding their children's vaccination records, and some parents revealed their children did not end up being vaccinated against measles because they either were not told by the school that the vaccinations were under way, or did not hear the announcement.

The paper, led by Sonya Nicholl of the NSW Health Immunisation Unit, says suggestions from parents to improve the scheme represented "new ideas to further improve delivery of school-based vaccination programs", even though the survey's size and response rate meant the responses themselves could not be generalised directly.

Measles has been a regular source of concern for health authorities in Australia, despite it being considered eliminated in 2014.<sup>1</sup> NSW Health issued an alert in March 2018 for people to be vigilant for symptoms of measles after a fifth diagnosed case<sup>2</sup>, and the disease's high degree of contagiousness means sporadic outbreaks remain a semi-regular event. Experts believe a vaccination rate of 95% is required with measles to ensure the population, including babies too young to be immunised themselves, remains protected.

The paper's authors said while the survey found high parent satisfaction with the immunisation scheme, the findings suggested future supplementary vaccination programs should be more closely tailored to the target groups to ensure high vaccination rates were maintained.

Another paper in this edition of the journal, by Anne Tiedemann and her colleagues, proposes a novel approach to improving flexibility and mobility among older Australians by advocating yoga as part of a falls prevention program. Her study found that not only are people willing to engage in a yoga-based mobility program, but that it is at least as popular as existing falls prevention programs.

The issue of improving health literacy in Australia is also addressed, with a paper by Jane Lloyd and colleagues finding that the health system needs to substantially raise its game in making information accessible, understandable and actionable for patients and the community. In her paper, she argues that this can be done by co-designing communication resources in collaboration with patients and communities, and providing better training for doctors and health staff to improve communication with patients.

In an editorial, Editor-in-Chief Professor Don Nutbeam called for researchers to "put the 'public' back into public health", by ensuring more research focused on testing interventions that deliver tangible health benefits for individuals and communities.

"The research community, particularly in the health and medical arena, and those who fund the research, need to be constantly asking themselves what research is going to have the most real-world impact, relevance and genuine engagement with the public," said Professor Don Nutbeam, who is also a Professor of Public Health at Sydney University. "Providing answers to the questions that the Australian community has around public health issues is what we should be focused on."

Professor Nutbeam said the papers in this edition of the journal provide a good example of the full spectrum of public health research that is of practical use to the wider community.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-measles-elim-announce-2014.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/measles-March2018.aspx>

"The papers in this edition canvas a wide range of topics – but they all share a practical grounding in issues that are of value to the wider community," said Professor Nutbeam. "While this can sometimes be challenging – particularly when most research grant funding systems reward narrowly defined, methodologically-pure research – it is incumbent on all of us in the research community to focus on issues of genuine impact and relevance to the local community."

#### **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

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**Papers in this issue of *Public Health Research & Practice* (note that links will become live once the papers are published – please contact us if you require advanced copies of any papers):**

[Editorial: Putting the 'public' back in public health research](#)

The Australian community places value on research which has an impact on public health, or provides an opportunity for engagement and shared decision-making around priorities that the community itself has identified.

[Measles high school vaccination program, 2014–2015: online survey of parents in NSW, Australia](#)

NSW parents are satisfied with school-based vaccination programs, but have highlighted several ways they can be improved, a survey finds.

[Adapting to Sydney's local government boundaries changes: a population health perspective](#)

NSW council amalgamations will have implications for the planning of health services, requiring new partnerships that address issues such as changes in health priorities, resource allocation and reporting systems.

[How can communities and organisations improve their health literacy?](#)

Knowing how to make the right decisions about your health is a critical skill, and now health organisations and services are increasingly recognising that they also have an important role to play.

[Involving consumers in health research: what do consumers say?](#)

Involving the public in health research requires greater transparency, clearer communications and making involvement in research easier and a more positive experience, a study finds.

[Optimising the use of linked administrative data for infectious diseases research in Australia](#)

Demand for linked data is starting to outweigh the capabilities of existing infrastructure, with a need to improve data access and sharing, a new paper finds.

[Is a yoga-based program with potential to decrease falls perceived to be acceptable to community-dwelling people older than 60?](#)

Researchers say yoga should be investigated as a way to prevent falls, after finding that older people rate the practice as an acceptable form of exercise.

[Participant perspectives of a 6-month telephone-based lifestyle coaching program](#)

A good relationship with a health coach is key to a participant's success, finds an evaluation of a telephone-based lifestyle coaching program in NSW.

[Evaluation of 'Stop Smoking in its Tracks': an intensive smoking cessation program for pregnant Aboriginal women incorporating contingency-based financial rewards](#)

Financial rewards may be effective in helping Aboriginal women who are pregnant quit smoking, new research finds.

[The conduct of Australian Indigenous primary health care research focusing on social and emotional wellbeing: a systematic review](#)

Culturally sensitive approaches, developing relationships and involving community members appear to enable research that delivers positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians, according to a new paper.