

# Medical Bulletin

## Welcome to the South East Public Health Unit (SEPHU) Quarterly Medical Bulletin for December 2025

Before we farewell 2025, we would like to highlight some key issues, events and provide updates on what has been happening locally. A health advisory was issued in November by The Chief Health Officer of Victoria regarding [travel immunisations](#). Measles continues to be the dominant topic with Canada recently losing its measles elimination status due to the ongoing outbreak. In this issue, we highlight how health practitioners can play a role in preventing the spread of measles locally.

We provide an update on the new process for rabies vaccine ordering. We also provide links to publicly available data by The Victorian Department of Health and touch on varicella infection and vaccination.

We wish everyone a safe and enjoyable holiday period.

## Protecting our community against measles through vaccination and prompt diagnosis

The highly infectious viral infection can be prevented with two doses of measles containing vaccine. The measles mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine is free for eligible children under the National Immunisation Program (NIP). [Victoria offers a state funded free MMR vaccine](#) program for the following cohorts regardless of Medicare status:

- Infants from 6 months and before 11 months of age prior to overseas travel (as an additional dose to those covered under the NIP)
- All people born during or since 1966 without evidence of receiving 2 documented doses of valid MMR or without serological evidence of immunity

Consider vaccinating patients with no documented doses of MMR vaccine in your clinic opportunistically. State funded vaccines can be ordered through [Onelink](#). Please contact SEPHU at [sephu.trace@monashhealth.org](mailto:sephu.trace@monashhealth.org) for queries regarding vaccine ordering.

Outbreak of measles are occurring globally with several locally transmitted measles cases within Australia and Victoria documented this year. Besides vaccination, prompt diagnosis of suspected cases can assist in limiting transmission.

Consider measles infection among patients who have clinically compatible symptoms – fever, coryza, conjunctivitis, cough and rash, especially if they have travelled, attended any exposure sites or had contact with a person with similar symptoms.

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- Obtain appropriate specimens for testing – nasopharyngeal swab +/- urine specimen for measles PCR as well as serology (IgG and IgM). Call your local public health unit on 1300 651 160 to notify upon suspicion
- Swab of lesion or rash is not an appropriate specimen for measles testing

Measles exposure sites within Victoria can be found on the [Department of Health website](#).

Resources are available for your practice including posters, and information on measles contact management on the [Department of Health website](#).

## Change to rabies post exposure prophylaxis ordering

General practice ordering rabies post exposure vaccines for their patients will now have to submit their order form to [sephu.trace@monashhealth.org](mailto:sephu.trace@monashhealth.org). The change from ordering from the Immunisation Unit at the Department of Health to local public health units occurred on 1 December 2025.

Information on this change, as well as a copy of the order form can be found on the Department of Health's website – [Immunisation – ordering vaccines](#).

Forms will be processed during business hours (9 am to 4 pm). If the form is submitted after hours, this will be actioned on the next business day.

For any urgent after-hours response, please contact SEPHU on the urgent notification line by calling 1300 651 160.

## Infectious disease epidemiological reports

[Interactive infectious disease reports](#) covering epidemiological data for notifiable infectious diseases within Victoria are available online from the Department of Health. This data covers all notifiable conditions within Victoria, enabling clinicians and members of the public to see disease trends by condition, year and region.

A range of [Interactive infectious disease reports](#) can be accessed on the Department of Health website, including:

- All notifiable conditions – [Local government areas summary \(includes state wide Victoria\)](#)

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- [HIV quarterly surveillance report](#)
- [Syphilis quarterly surveillance report](#)
- [Tuberculosis \(TB\) quarterly surveillance report](#)
- [Mosquito and mosquito-borne disease surveillance report](#)
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander summary \(state wide Victoria\)](#)
- [Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacterales surveillance report.](#)

The Department of Health also publishes a fortnightly [Victorian respiratory surveillance report](#) providing an overview of recent trends for notifiable respiratory diseases including influenza, COVID-19 and RSV.

## Varicella infection and vaccination

There has been approximately 30% increase in varicella (chickenpox) notifications within the catchment this year, compared with the same time last year. Most cases are among young and school-aged children with several schools and early learning centers reporting outbreaks. Any person presenting with a compatible illness suspected to have chickenpox or shingles should be tested, regardless of their vaccination status.

The varicella (chickenpox) vaccine is 80-85% effective at preventing infection within the first year, and highly effective at preventing severe disease. Immunity, however, wanes within a few years. Chickenpox infection can still occur in vaccinated individuals (breakthrough varicella), though the illness is generally much milder. Individuals with breakthrough varicella may still transmit the virus to others.

One dose of a chickenpox vaccine is funded under the National Immunisation Program (NIP) for children at 18 months of age. A second dose of chickenpox vaccine, to be administered  $\geq 4$  weeks after the first dose is recommended, however it is not funded under the NIP. Consider recommending the second dose to patients to increase protection and reduce the risk of breakthrough varicella. Unfortunately, there is a [current shortage](#) of monovalent varicella vaccines, though this is anticipated to resolve by early next year.

Shingles (herpes zoster) vaccine is also available through the NIP for adults to reduce the severity of illness. The 2-dose course is available for

- People aged 65 years and over
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and over
- Those 18 years and over considered at increased risk of herpes zoster.

For further information about chickenpox and shingles vaccination, see [The Australian Immunisation Handbook](#).

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## Federation University Innovative Breakfast Session

On 7 October 2025, Prof Aziz Rahman and his team at Federation University successfully hosted a breakfast session with panelists consisting of clinicians, health promotion officers and members from Cardinia Shire Council. Moderated by Professor Rhonda Stuart, the panelists discussed issues relating to the health impacts of smoking and vaping as well as the environmental impact of inappropriate disposal of vapes and e-cigarettes.

We look forward to more collaborative work in the future!



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On behalf of the South East Public Health Unit, we wish you a safe and enjoyable holiday season and extend our heartfelt thanks to you and your organisation for all that has been achieved this year.

Your efforts continue to make our community a healthier place to live, work and play.

**Professor Rhonda Stuart**  
Director, Public Health and Infection  
Prevention, Monash Health