Dear Colleagues

1. Immunisation health target

Thank you for your on-going efforts to immunise children. We have come a long way towards achieving the current health target of 95 percent coverage for two-year-old children.

Please recall any child on your register who is turning two this quarter and is not fully immunised. Your DHB NIR Administrator, Immunisation Coordinator and/or Outreach Nurse may be able to help you with reports or finding children.

Other practical suggestions:
- Refresh your recall lists and repeat your recall of any children turning two in the next month
- Refer any families who you are struggling to immunise to your outreach service and consider using the assistance of a Pacific or Maori health provider in your area, if this is appropriate
- Offer to vaccinate any child who is not up-to-date with their immunisations.

2. Immunisation Week 2012 – Thank you

Thank you for getting behind Immunisation Week this year. It is only the second time that New Zealand has taken part in the World Health Organisation initiative. Participation this year came from general practices, PHOs, DHBs, Medical Officers of Health, Plunket, members of the public, ministers, and many others. There was a wide range of community activities and media coverage.

3. Pertussis

High levels of pertussis continue in many areas, with more than 3,400 cases reported nationally since August 2011 when the current outbreak began. Children under one-year-old, who are the most at risk of severe illness, have accounted for seven percent of cases and 62 percent of hospitalisations. The latest surveillance information can be found at: http://www.surv.esr.cri.nz/surveillance/PertussisRpt.php.

Pertussis vaccine and pregnant women

Pregnant women over 20 weeks of gestation can be immunised with pertussis vaccine, based on international evidence http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6041a4.htm. As Boostrix is not approved specifically for use in pregnancy, this would be considered to fall outside of its approved indications and therefore “off-label” use. Section 25 of the Medicines Act allows off-label use of medicines (including vaccines) providing that doctors have informed consent from the patient and exercise a duty of care. See: http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/RIss/unapp.asp#25.

Azithromycin suspension – new listing

PHARMAC has recently considered an application for funding Azithromycin suspension for infants and have advised that they have approved Azithromycin suspension on the pharmaceutical schedule from 1 June 2012 for children under one year of age who have Pertussis or are contacts.

Please refer to the pharmaceutical schedule for restrictions on the use of Azithromycin suspension.

4. Meningococcal disease

With winter upon us, it is timely for a reminder that as soon as meningococcal disease is suspected in a patient, parenteral antibiotics should be immediately administered before admission to hospital or in hospital if delays and assessment in hospital are likely to be more than 30 minutes.

Information about the case and the treatment given should be made available to the hospital staff as soon as possible.

As well, attending medical practitioners must immediately notify the local Medical Officer of Health of suspected cases. Notification should not await confirmation.

5. Flu programme

The Ministry of Health is pleased to announce that distribution of Influenza vaccine has been high and we are now approaching more than 920,400 doses of vaccine being distributed.

This year the aim is to reach one million doses by 31 July. In order for us to do this, your help is needed to ensure that everyone who can be vaccinated is, including pregnant women. FLUVAX and FLURIX are influenza vaccines available free to the eligible population.

6. New Act-HIB pack (one syringe and two needles)

On 19 December 2011 we informed you that there was an issue with the fixed needle syringe which came with the Act-HIB vaccine. Since then additional needles and a luer lok syringe have been sent with all Act-HIB orders.

Sanofi has now resolved the issue and the new Act-HIB pack contains a single dose vial of freeze dried vaccine, a diluent syringe without attached needle and two separate needles, a 25G x 16mm needle for reconstitution and a 23G x 25mm needle for injection.

The new Act-HIB packs will start to be distributed with your orders during June. The Act-HIB is offered on the National Immunisation Schedule at 15 months and to at-risk groups.

If you have any queries about anything in this update, please email immunisation@moh.govt.nz.

Kim Albrecht, Acting National Programme Manager, Immunisation