

State rejects no-immunisation, no-childcare plan ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Health Minister David Davis has rejected an opposition plan to allow childcare centres to turn away children who are not fully immunised, saying educating parents is the key to lifting coverage rates.

If re-elected in November, Mr Davis said, the government would set a target for 95 per cent of children to be immunised by the time they start school.

Of Victoria's children, 92.6 per cent are now fully immunised at age five but coverage rates vary throughout the state.

New Health Department figures show the local government areas of Mansfield (83.3 per cent), Melbourne (83.5 per cent) and Hepburn (85.7 per cent) have the state's lowest rates of immunisation for five-year-olds.

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Other areas lagging on immunisation included Ararat (86.2 per cent) and inner-city Port Phillip (87.4 per cent) and Stonnington (88.4 per cent).

Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews this month announced that Labor would require children to provide an immunisation status certificate before enrolling in childcare if it wins government.

He said children who were not fully immunised would not be able to enrol in childcare unless they had a medical reason or their parents registered as conscientious objectors, which would require them to receive counselling from a medical professional advising them of the risks.

Mr Davis said the government did not believe in "penalising children for the decisions of their parents" and believed working with families to raise immunisation rates would have better results.

He was confident rates could be increased by "rigorous enforcement" of existing rules requiring vaccination status certificates for children enrolling in primary school.

Schools can then identify children who have not been immunised in the event of an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease such as measles.

Mr Davis said there was always a small group of parents who objected to immunisation but many could change their minds if given more information.

"We need to be prepared to talk to those parents [and] put the case very strongly to them to make sure no child slips through the cracks," he said.

Each case should be "followed up in full to make sure the opportunity is there for immunisation and to make sure it is delivered in as many cases as possible."

Many parents had simply overlooked the jabs, Mr Davis said.

"Often it's parents not paying attention to this ... and that is the job of government to educate and to work with local government and GPs to ensure the best outcomes."

-reprinted from the Age

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/02/state-rejects-no-immunisation-no-childcare-plan> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/health>