

**Question on Notice
No. 339
Asked on 2 May 2013**

MS TRAD asked the Minister for Health (MR SPRINGBORG)-

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise the House what strategies are in place to reverse the alarming downward trend in childhood immunisation rates across the state and identify which organisational unit in Queensland Health is responsible for protecting the community from infectious diseases?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for South Brisbane for her question.

I am pleased to be able to report that immunisation coverage for Queensland children has in fact improved over time and is now at levels over 90 per cent for the three cohorts routinely reported.

Since commencement of reporting of coverage for children 12-15 months old, the rate improved from 83.2 per cent in June 1998 to 92.32 per cent in April 2013. This is higher than the national average of 91.5 per cent. Coverage for children 24-27 months old improved from 68.3 per cent in June 1998 to 92.6 per cent in April 2013. This is also higher than the national average of 92.2 per cent.

Reporting of coverage for children aged 60-63 months commenced in March 2008 and in that time has improved from 80.6 per cent to 91.9 per cent in April 2013. The national average for this cohort is 91.7 per cent.

These improvements are the result of a strong collaborative effort between all stakeholders, including General Practitioners, Divisions of General Practice, Local Governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector and the Australian Government.

While Queensland does have high immunisation coverage at the state level, there are some areas of low coverage. I am also aware that immunisation coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is lower than for non Indigenous children.

Initiatives to improve immunisation rates for these areas of low coverage include provision of resources for parents and immunisation providers, and regular letters to parents of children who have been identified as unimmunised. The Department of Health has provided funding to Hospital and Health Services to support immunisation activities at a local level. This will include collaboration with Medicare Locals to identify and target areas of low immunisation coverage. The Department of Health has also provided funding to the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council to support immunisation activities in this sector.

More generally, because immunisation is extremely important and highly effective at preventing serious and life threatening infectious diseases, the immunisation program is overseen by the Communicable Diseases Unit, which is within the portfolio of the Chief Health Officer, with operational responsibility for the delivery of immunisation services and local effectiveness being the purview of the Hospital and Health Services.