

# **FACT SHEET**

## **Australian Government funding of rotavirus vaccine 28 March 2007**

### **What is rotavirus?**

Rotavirus gastroenteritis is a highly infectious virus causing severe diarrhoea. About 42 per cent of cases are babies under 12 months and 92 per cent of cases are children under 5 years of age. In children under 5 years, rotavirus results in 10,000 hospitalisations, 22,000 emergency department visits and 115,000 GP visits every year.

The impact of rotavirus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is much more severe. They are three to five times more likely to be hospitalised, are often hospitalised at a younger age and stay more than twice as long in hospital compared with other infants.

### **Is there a vaccine for rotavirus?**

There are two rotavirus vaccines: Rotarix® from GlaxoSmithKline and RotaTeq® from CSL Limited. Both brands are registered by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), but only for use in babies between 2 to 6 months of age. They are taken orally (not injected) as follows:

Rotarix®: 2 doses - at 2 months and 4 months of age.

RotaTeq®: 3 doses - at 2 months, 4 months, and 6 months of age.

### **Is the Government going to fund rotavirus vaccines?**

Yes. The Government has agreed with the recommendation of its expert advisory group, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC), that these two rotavirus vaccines be funded under the National Immunisation Program. The Government has committed funding of \$124.4 million over five years for a national rotavirus vaccination program.

### **When will the Government's rotavirus vaccination program start?**

The two rotavirus vaccines will be available at no cost under the National Immunisation Program from 1 July 2007. All babies born from 1 May 2007 will be eligible for free rotavirus vaccine.

The vaccine will be available from GPs and other immunisation service providers such as local community immunisation clinics. The rotavirus vaccine will generally be given at the same time as other immunisations at 2, 4 and 6 months of age, depending on the brand used.

Parents may be required to pay a consultation fee if the vaccination is provided by a GP. However, most children will have the vaccine when they are already getting their other vaccines so there won't be an extra cost.

### **Will the vaccines be available to children over 6 months of age?**

No. Both Rotarix® and RotaTeq® are only registered for use for babies between 2 and 6 months of age.

### **Why can't the rotavirus vaccination program start sooner?**

The 1 July 2007 start date will ensure that the vaccines will be available in the winter months when rotavirus is more prevalent, but still give states and territories enough time to put in place arrangements to distribute the vaccine. It will also allow sufficient time to distribute information on the vaccine to parents, carers of children, GPs and other immunisation providers.

**Where can I get more information?**

More information on the National Immunisation Program and vaccines is available at the Immunise Australia web site. [www.immunise.health.gov.au/](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/)

Parents, carers and immunisation providers can also contact their state or territory health department for further information.

[www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/contacts](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/contacts)