

# Time to end jab debate - expert

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SOUTH Australia's chief doctor has called for an end to the vaccination debate, urging everyone to "do the right thing" to protect themselves and save lives.

His call follows the release of two major studies - one from the University of Adelaide - which show the benefits of vaccination outweigh any risk.

SA Health chief medical officer Paddy Phillips urged parents to ensure their children were immunised against diseases and that all South Australians get a flu jab.

"I think absolutely the debate should be over, people should do the right thing and get their children, themselves and their families vaccinated," Prof Phillips said.

"Vaccinations are one of the greatest public health initiatives that has improved the health of humans over the last hundred years.

"They're probably the most important public health initiative since sewage and running water in terms of preventing death and illness.

"There is no doubt that vaccination, to protect ourselves and the community, is the right thing to do."

A University of Adelaide study - published in the *Pediatric Infectious Disease Journal* yesterday - found the number of children hospitalised with chicken pox or shingles had dropped 68 per cent since the introduction of the vaccine in 2006.

A second study, which was published in the prestigious medical journal *The Lancet*, highlighted the benefits of a US vaccination program during the 2009 outbreak of H1N1, or swine flu.

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'To me, it's responsible parenting'

# No regrets on vaccinating

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## COMMENT

AS a new mum, the idea of not vaccinating my baby never entered my head. I have girlfriends who didn't go down the vaccination road and, while I'm open-minded to their rationale, I'm not convinced by it.

Having trained as a nurse, I have a faith in modern medicine and, like most of the women I know, I trust my GP.

She gave me information about how vaccination works, guiding me on what my baby needed and when.

Before becoming a mum, I gave no thought to the vaccination debate but when you hear the words "prevent", "your

baby" and "measles, mumps, whooping cough and meningococcal" used in the same sentence, you simply don't hesitate to take action.

To me, it came down to responsible parenting.

I'm not saying doctors are gods - I know there are two sides to the vaccination debate.

But I also know which side I'm on when it comes to the health of my child.

Even as I was holding down my screaming baby's legs so he could be jabbed in both legs at the same time, I knew I was doing the right thing.

As a new mum, you are sleep-

deprived, on a massive learning curve and, suddenly, your whole world is consumed by the wellbeing of this tiny person.

How on Earth could I live with myself if my son became seriously ill or died from a disease that I could have prevented?

I know vaccinations carry their own risk, but this was something I could live with and the science seems to support my decision. I couldn't risk not immunising.

The internet is flooded with information, as well as misinformation, about vaccination.

But it all comes down to personal choice and, for our family, vaccination was a vital step in giving my child the best and safest start in life.

# Time to end jab row

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## BEATING CHICKEN POX

Prof Phillips said vaccines became publicly available only once stringent quality and safety testing processes had been followed.

"That means that it not only has to be effective and be valuable but it has to show absolutely, without any question of a doubt, that it's cost-effective," he said.

He said smallpox - a highly contagious and deadly disease - had been eradicated around the world and now existed only in laboratories.

Other diseases such as polio, which caused disability and death, tetanus, diphtheria, measles, German measles and whooping cough have also been substantially reduced.

In SA, he said 90 per

cent of all four-year-olds had received the recommended vaccinations, a figure he would like to see higher.

After it was introduced, the same four hospitals reported 227 cases over the three-year period 2007-10.

That equates to a 68 per cent drop in the number of children with chicken pox.



Of those needing hospitalisation for severe chicken pox, 80 per cent had not been immunised.

It is expected thousands of children have been prevented from being hospitalised since the vaccine's widespread introduction in 2006.

## OVERCOMING THE FLU

It is estimated that during a 2009 H1N1 outbreak, a vaccination program in the US prevented 700,000-1.5 million clinical cases of influenza, up to 10,000 hospital admissions and up to 500 deaths.

About 23 million vaccinated people were included in the study. An extra 1.6 cases of Guillain-Barre syndrome were associated with the vaccine per 1 million people vaccinated.

Guillain-Barre syndrome is a disorder of the nervous system disorder which can result in death.

The study used data from four major Australian children's hospitals, including the Women's and Children's Hospital in North Adelaide, over two three-year periods before and after the vaccine became widely available in 2006.

From 1999-2001, there were 710 children hospitalised at the four sites. The figure fell to 227 between 2007-10 once the vaccine was available.

Complications of chicken pox can include pneumonia, seizures and meningitis, and unborn babies of pregnant women who get chicken pox can suffer severe abnormalities including limb deformities.

The swine flu study found the H1N1 vaccination was associated with a small excess risk - about 1.6 extra cases

per one million people vaccinated - of acquiring Guillain-Barre syndrome, a disorder of the nervous system that can result in paralysis and sometimes death.

The authors said the vaccine had prevented an estimated 700,000-1.5 million influenza cases in the US.

"In view of the morbidity and mortality caused by 2009 H1N1 influenza and the effectiveness of the vaccine, clinicians, policy makers and those eligible for vaccination should be assured that the benefits of inactivated pandemic vaccines greatly outweigh the risks," the study says.

Prof Phillips said the Australian Vaccination Network Inc, a group that advocates debate about vaccination, was spreading misinformation and lies. "They

don't put a balanced argument and I honestly don't understand why they do this."

Fair Trading NSW has ordered the AVN to change its name by March 21, on the grounds it does not convey the group's anti-vaccination stance and could mislead.

The network yesterday lodged a review against that decision.

The network's president, Greg Beattie, said the debate must remain open because questions about vaccine safety still existed.

"It's a legitimate debate that has to happen," he said.

"The AVN does not advocate in any form about whether people should vaccinate."

"The position that our organisation takes is it should remain open for debate."

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cent of all four-year-olds had received the recommended vaccinations, a figure he would like to see higher.

The lead author of the chicken pox study, University of Adelaide Associate Professor Helen Marshall, said the chicken pox vaccine had prevented thousands of children from hospitalisation and death.

"It's really important to look at diseases once a vaccine has been introduced to see what actually happens," Professor Marshall said.