
MEDIA RELEASE

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COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT FOR CHILDREN FROM 5 YEARS OF AGE MUST INCLUDE COMMUNITY PHARMACIES

The Tasmanian Branches of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia (Guild) and the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) have called on the Tasmanian Health Minister to move quickly to allow Tasmanian community pharmacies to join the COVID-19 vaccination rollout to children aged 5 – 11.

In early December last year the Australian Government accepted recommendations from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) that Australia's COVID-19 vaccination program be extended to all children aged 5 to 11, from 10 January 2022.

According to Guild Branch President Helen O'Byrne, "other Australian jurisdictions have moved quickly to enable pharmacists in community pharmacies to administer COVID-19 vaccines to children from 5 years of age as soon as Commonwealth approval was granted for this demographic, ensuring their community pharmacies would be able to participate in this important next step to bolster the country's defence against COVID-19. A month later Tasmania is yet to follow suit."

"We believe it is a mistake to limit vaccination options for this cohort to specialised child vaccination clinics and some GPs", Ms O'Byrne said. "Community pharmacies have trusted and established relationships with many Tasmanian parents and our members are already fielding enquiries from parents looking to have their children vaccinated. Crucially, pharmacies are located within local communities, with extended opening hours, making them easily accessible for time poor parents."

PSA Branch President David Peachey agreed, noting that "allowing pharmacists working in community pharmacies across the state to administer suitably approved COVID-19 vaccines to children from 5 years of age is crucial to achieving the same high vaccination rates in children as we have in the broader community."

"Throughout the pandemic pharmacists have continued to work hard for their communities", Mr Peachey said. "We see opportunity to further take pressure off Government hubs and General Practice and feel we should be given the choice to offer parents of children in this age group the option to choose their local community pharmacy."

Ms O'Byrne and Mr Peachey acknowledged that there are critical considerations for vaccinating young children, however Tasmanian pharmacists were involved in vaccinating children from 10 years during the meningococcal outbreak and administer influenza vaccinations to the same age group – and the core pharmacist immunisation training addresses child vaccination.

The Guild and PSA wrote to the Minister for Health in early November last year urging him to instruct his Department to amend the Tasmanian Immunisation Program Guidelines to allow pharmacists to administer suitably approved COVID-19 vaccines to children from 5 years of age in preparation for when the necessary TGA approvals were granted. This would have enabled pharmacists and community pharmacies to prepare well ahead of time for this critical next step which is due to commence tomorrow – 10 January.

"We are highly trained and capable healthcare professionals and we've contributed significantly to the success of Tasmania's COVID-19 vaccine rollout to date - we've stayed open, we've remained accessible, and we've continued to vaccinate throughout the holiday season – we call on the Minister to not shut us out now."

For further comment:

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