

Varying estimates of vaccine coverage could significantly change the estimate of vaccine efficacy in this study, and more detailed research is required to provide an accurate estimate.

The rise in the proportion of vaccine failures in Australia is consistent with the Canadian experience¹². However, while 34 cases met the Australian case definition of a vaccine failure, a further 24 cases would meet the United Kingdom vaccine failure definition. In the United Kingdom, where PRP-T vaccine is recommended at two, three and four months of age, a vaccine failure is defined as a case occurring after at least two doses of vaccine given in the first year of life or after a single vaccination given to children at the age of 12 months or more¹³. Using this definition, Australia would have had 58 vaccine failures, or 18% of cases under the age of six years. This difference indicates that the PRP-T may be a more immunogenic vaccine than those used in Australia. All the doses of vaccine recommended by the NHMRC appear to be required to prevent a high vaccine failure rate.

The HCSS does not provide information on risk factors for vaccine failures. In Canada a number of vaccine failures have been associated with underlying medical problems¹². Immune system defects may also be associated with vaccine failures¹⁴. Clinicians should consider further immunological investigation of Hib vaccine failures if underlying medical conditions are not present. In addition

the NHMRC recommends an additional dose of PRP-OMP at six months for premature children who commence on this vaccine⁴.

The 16 cases of invasive Hib disease which occurred in children who had not completed their course of vaccinations according to the NHMRC schedule, and many cases in unvaccinated children, were potentially preventable. Vaccination providers and parents should remain aware of the need to vaccinate children appropriately and on time against Hib.

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Hepatitis A outbreak in New South Wales

A cluster of hepatitis A infection reported to the South-Eastern Sydney Public Health Unit and the New South Wales Health Department has been linked to a Sydney restaurant. There have been 17 cases reported in the last two weeks, and all had dined at the restaurant between 11 and 18 May. Epidemiological investigations have shown that it is likely the

infections were caused by frozen prawns from Burma. Of the reported cases, ten are female and seven are male, with ages ranging from seven to 48.

The prawns have not been on sale to the general public and the importer is conducting a voluntary recall. The Public Health Unit and the New South Wales Health Department staff are

tracing other wholesale and distribution outlets to prevent further stocks of the implicated batch of prawns from reaching the public.