

# **Journal of Emergency Primary Health Care**

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

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**‘The Australian Immunisation Handbook 8<sup>th</sup> Edition’**. National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Government. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; 2003. 350 pages, ISBN 0-642-82204-2.  
Free. [www.immunise.health.gov.au](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au)

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***The Australian Immunisation Handbook***, produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, is Australia’s leading definitive and authoritative resource for immunisation and vaccination. The resource is prepared by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, which has representatives from an impressive yet diverse array of stakeholders, including clinicians, scientists, consumer representatives, and community groups.

The aim of this text is to provide health care workers from a variety of disciplines with expert advice on current working standards of the Immunise Australia Program and expert immunisation policies, guidelines, and disease-specific management programs for vaccine-preventable diseases.

Structurally, the resource is set out in textbook style. It consists of three distinct parts or chapters, and a series of appendices. Part 1 of the text outlines vaccination procedures and the standard vaccination schedule, including sections on clinical procedures for vaccinations, the Australian Vaccination Schedule, consent, vaccination checklist, adverse effect procedures, and the transport, storage, and handling of vaccinations. Part 2 provides in-depth coverage of vaccination for special risk groups (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, immunodeficient, and compromised), vaccination for international travellers, and individuals at risk of occupationally-acquired preventable diseases. Part 3 of the text explores each of the vaccine-preventable diseases in detail, describing their aetiology, clinical features, epidemiology, vaccination dosages, adverse event management procedures, contraindications, special considerations (such as use in pregnancy), and additional reference for further reading. Meningococcal infection is covered in considerable detail. The appendices include an interesting array of material, such as contact details for all State and Commonwealth Government Health Authorities and Outbreak Control, standards for childhood vaccination, the ‘golden rules’ of vaccination and ‘cold-chain’, frequently asked questions regarding vaccination, definitions of

commonly used terms, and even a glossary of technical terms to assist parents with assessment of vaccination options for their children.

The book includes removable cards that list the standard Australian Vaccination Schedule and fold-out cards that list commonly observed adverse events following specific vaccines for ease of access. The back cover of the book provides a table that lists each vaccine-preventable disease, the effects of the disease, and the comparative side effects of vaccination. This sleeve would serve as a useful teaching resource for health workers, particularly those who are involved in informing parents about the risks and benefits of immunisation.

An electronic version of the book, the E-Handbook, comes with every hardcopy in the form of a CD-ROM containing all the resources plus additional reference material for further information. The E-Handbook is designed to be installed on your computer, and includes PDF copies of the text that may be downloaded or printed, and website links to relevant organisations. The E-Handbook also provides additional resources including parent advice sheets, a catch-up-calendar (to allow health care workers to provide advice on incomplete vaccination schedules where individuals has missed vaccinations), a 'what's new' area, and a search engine. The E-Handbook also provides the capability for 'on-line updates'—it is able to access the homepage and update information automatically to ensure up-to-date information. The E-Handbook is available at <http://www1.health.gov.au/immhandbook/>.

The text is very easy to use and structured in a user-friendly way. Graphically, the text is easy to follow and combines the use of diagrams and illustrations with text-boxes to highlight key points with consistency. Chapters and Subchapters are easily identifiable by their spines because of the use of indexed coloured block markers at the edge of the page listing the relevant disease or topic.

This is an important resource for the pre-hospital health care provider. Community health workers, particularly nurses in community health centres, play a key role in the management of vaccine-preventable diseases. While paramedic and ambulance personnel generally do not routinely administer vaccines, there is growing evidence in support of their multifaceted role in immunisation programs. Clinical practice guidelines in the UK, for example, have expanded the role of paramedics to include antibiotic administration for suspected meningococcal infection. The ability of meningococcal disease to manifest and progress rapidly and the consequent morbidity and mortality is cause for alarm among health care workers and the community internationally. Paramedics and ambulance personnel should have a sound working knowledge of vaccine-preventable diseases, their aetiology, clinical manifestations, treatment, and other critical aspects, such as infection control. Whether their participation involves the administration of vaccines and prophylactic antibiotic cover or providing support and advice to individuals regarding immunisation, health care workers are central to the success of immunisation programs.

The Australian Immunisation Handbook is an excellent user-friendly resource, a comprehensive and authoritative text providing expert advice and guidelines for health care workers on vaccine-preventable diseases. It is essential reading for the array of health care workers involved in immunisation programs, whether their role encompasses informing parents and individuals, the administration of vaccinations and antibiotics or post-immunisation care.