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Over-3s pneumococcal vax of limited benefit

PARENTS seeking extra reassurance against pneumococcal disease can vaccinate children older than three, but the disease incidence rapidly drops after this age, an expert says.

The new, 13-valent vaccine Prevenar 13 became freely available last month to young children under a government-funded "supplemental dose program".

Children aged 12-35 months — who are already fully immunised with the older, seven-valent Prevenar — are now eligible to receive a single booster dose of the new vaccine.

However, Professor Robert Booy, a paediatrician at the Children's Hospital at Westmead in Sydney, said parents were already asking GPs if they could vaccinate children older than 35 months, and pay for the booster dose themselves.

"Some parents want a little bit of added reassurance — and that's not unreasonable — but it's only a little bit of

added reassurance," Professor Booy said.

"Although pneumococcal incidence falls off rapidly after the age of three, there are still cases between three and school age. It's just much less common.

"The new Prevenar has got 19a, which has been the most troublesome serotype around for the last few years. So it is a good switch to make from [Prevenar] 7 to 13, so we're getting cover from just about all of the worrying serotypes."

Prevenar 13 is indicated for immunisation of children aged from six weeks to five years, whereas Prevenar is indicated for those aged from six weeks to nine years.

The new vaccine is estimated to cover 93% of serotypes causing invasive pneumococcal vaccine among children under five.

The cost of the new vaccine to parents paying privately is \$120-\$150.

Nyssa Skilton



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