

CYPRUS

The Childhood Immunization Programme in Cyprus is set at national level by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Cyprus. The aim of the National Immunization Programme is to reach, maintain and improve on high levels of immunization of all children at the appropriate age and at the recommended doses particularly for children in vulnerable groups. To achieve this, the Ministry of Health and more specifically the Medical and Public Health Services which is the responsible body, has adopted the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) and closely adheres to the recommendations of the WHO. The Immunization Programme is an ongoing process and it is modified and updated according to the changes in epidemiological data, socioeconomic status and international scientific information.

The Ministry of Health issued the most recent update of the immunization programme in 2005, based on advices of the Cyprus National Immunization Advisory Committee.

In order to ensure a unified approach to vaccine administration, a vaccination booklet with the recommended programme, background information on the vaccines, their side effects and contraindications is disseminated to all health workers involved in administration of vaccines. Moreover, a protocol for correct and safe storage and dissemination of vaccines is also circulated to health workers in order to safeguard cold chain.

In the Public Sector, immunization is carried out by the Health Visitors in the Child Health Centres and the School Health Services under the guidance of Public Health Doctors while in the private sector vaccines are given by Paediatricians. It is estimated that 33% of children are vaccinated in the public sector and 67% in the private sector.

The vaccines for the use of public sector are purchased centrally by the Pharmaceutical Services of the Ministry of Health through the marketing authorisation holders of the pharmaceutical companies in Cyprus. On the other hand the vaccines given by the private sector are purchased by the pharmacists through the authorisation holders of the pharmaceutical companies.

In the public sector the following vaccinations are available free of charge to all the residents of Cyprus regardless of their socioeconomic status: Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis (DTP), Poliomyelitis (IPV/OPV), Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR), Hepatitis B and Haemophilus Influenzae type b (Hib).

Due to the lack of statistical information from the private sector – the Ministry of Health (Medical and Public Health Services) performs a three yearly survey for the immunization coverage at national level in children 17 – 24 months of age. This survey is carried out in accordance with the recommendations and a relevant protocol of the World Health Organization to determine vaccine

coverage and the degree of correct timing of the first and subsequent vaccination administration according to the WHO guidelines.

Comparison of the results of the most recent survey is made with results available from previous surveys. This contributes significantly to the maintenance and improvement of the immunization coverage and in general to the formation of future immunization policy. The last survey was carried out last May (2006) and the results are expected soon.

Furthermore, being in the measles elimination phase and with the aim of increasing the coverage of school children at the age of 6 years, 11-12 years and recently also at the age of 17-18 years with the 2 doses of MMR, the School Health Services have been carrying out a yearly intervention since school year 2001-2002. During this survey, school health visitors evaluate the vaccination cards of the students and in case of incomplete vaccination (no vaccine or only one dose of MMR) they inform the parents or guardians about the importance and the necessity to complete the vaccination of their children. Those children are given the option of being vaccinated at school by the school health visitors or attending a mother and child welfare centre or if they wish to visit their own private doctor. As a result of this intervention a significant increase in the immunization coverage for MMR vaccination was achieved.

The immunization scheme can be seen in the table below:

Age	BC G	Diphthe ria tetanus	Poliomy elitis	Pertuss is	Hib	Hepatit is B	Pneu mo coccus	Measles – mumps – rubella	Men C	Var	Inf lue nz a
Birth	NR 1										
2-3 months		YES	YES ²	YES ³	YE S	YES	YES ⁴				
4-5 months		YES	YES	YES	YE S	YES	YES				
6-8 months		YES	YES	YES	YE S		YES				YE S ⁵
8-12 months						YES					

12-13 months									YES	
12-15 months							YES	YES		
12-18 months					YES					
13-18 months										YES ⁶
15-20 months		YES	YES	YES						
4-6 years		YES	YES	YES				YES		
11-12 years ⁷						YES		YES		YES
14-16 years		YES ⁸								

¹ BCG is given only to children when there's a continuous contact with a case of contagious form of TB.

² IPV has replaced OPV at the ages of 2 and 4 months from 2003 onwards.

³ The Pertussis vaccine in the public sector is still the whole cell vaccine whereas in the private sector both the cellular and acellular are available.

⁴ Pneumococcal and Meningococcal conjugated vaccines are given universally by the private sector while by the public sector only to targeted groups e.g. sickle cell disease, immune deficiency e.t.c.

⁵ Influenza vaccine is administered to children of high risk groups e.g. diabetics and asthmatics from 6 months of age.

⁶ Varicella is being administered universally in the private sector while in the public sector only to the high risk groups.

⁷ Hepatitis B, MMR and Varicella vaccines are given at the age of 11-12 years if recommended doses were missed before.

⁸ Td, adult type- Booster dose is then given every 10 years.