



# Parents support compulsory jabs

In a daily series this week, *The West Australian* and HBF join forces to examine the biggest health issues affecting the State



## CATHY O'LEARY

Almost two-thirds of West Australians believe routine childhood vaccination should be compulsory, a new survey has revealed.

A poll of 800 people by Painted Dog Research for health insurer HBF and *The West Australian* also found that more than half of people believed parents who refused to vaccinate their children were irresponsible.

The findings come as health authorities on Friday lifted a suspension on the seasonal flu vaccine for young children, after confirming bad reactions earlier this year was linked to only one vaccine, the CSL product Fluvax.

The WA Wellness Survey included equal numbers of singles or couples with no children, parents with dependent children, empty-nesters and people over the age of 65. It found 76 per cent of people were confident that immunisation overall was safe for most people,

with higher support among those with private health insurance and people who had the flu vaccine this year. Parents with dependent children were less confident about the safety.

While 42 per cent of people believed seasonal flu vaccination was not safe for children, experts said this was likely a reflection of the recent suspension of the program in young children.

Dr Peter Richmond, who heads the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research's Vaccine Trial Group, said the results overall were reassuring.

"I think it shows the majority of parents still realise the benefits of immunisation for their children, and generally Australia has high uptake rates and our whole population benefits from it," he said.

"It's reassuring that most people have a positive attitude to immunisation but it's important not to be

complacent, because if rates do drop we could see the re-emergence of diseases that we haven't seen for a long time.

"But we also need ongoing activity to make sure there aren't any safety issues that parents need to be concerned about."

Yetunde Quartermaine, of South Perth, took part in the HBF survey and was one of those who said parents who did not immunise their children were irresponsible.

She said her 12-year-old daughter Fiona had received all her childhood vaccines, as well as boosters at school, and was a healthy teenager.

"It's not really a big issue for me because I come from a medical background and I know the importance of it," she said.

"I think the vaccines really help the child's immune system, and there is the risk that all these old illnesses will come back if we don't continue vaccinating our children."



**Healthy:** Yetunde Quartermaine and her daughter, Fiona, who has had all the childhood vaccines.

Picture: Ian Munro