



Faith in vaccinations restored

In a series starting today, *The West* and health insurer HBF examine the big health issues in WA, Medical Editor **Cathy O'Leary** writes.

Many West Australians have regained confidence in vaccinations, including a surge in the number of people supporting compulsory childhood immunisation, new survey results show.

A year after some parents lost faith in vaccines after a spate of seizures in young children who had the seasonal flu vaccine, three-quarters of people surveyed in June said they supported mandatory childhood vaccination.

The telephone poll of more than 600 adults was carried out by Painted Dog Research for health insurer HBF and *The West Australian*.

Two-thirds of those polled said parents who did not vaccinate their children were irresponsible.

While only a third of parents said their children had received the flu vaccine this year, the number of people who felt the vaccine was unsafe in children halved, falling from 42 per cent during a similar survey last year to 21 per cent, while almost half of people said they now considered the vaccine safe. The CSL vaccine linked to last year's side effects, Fluvax, is no longer used in WA's free vaccination program for children under the age of five.

The survey also found overall confidence in vaccines rose from 76 per cent last year to 90 per cent this year. Men were more confident

than women that vaccines protected people from getting sick.

Australian Medical Association WA spokesman Richard Choong, a Port Kennedy GP, said while some parents were still wary of the flu vaccine, it was reassuring fewer parents were worried about the safety of this year's vaccine, as well as other inoculations.

"There is a good uptake of the flu vaccine in adults this year but without a doubt some parents are still declining it in their children, and that may cause problems later on in the season," Dr Choong said.

"But it's pleasing there seems to be more support for the vaccination program as a whole because it would be a major concern if people lost faith in it."

Telethon Institute of Child Health Research vaccine trials coordinator Peter Richmond said it seemed the public understood the benefits of vaccination in preventing serious infections.

"It appears that more parents are now aware that the problems last year with the flu vaccine in young children only involved a single brand and the remaining flu vaccines are safe for use in young children," Dr Richmond said. Netherlands mother Jen Turner took part in the HBF survey and was one of the respondents who strongly supported childhood vaccination.

Her eight-month-old baby

Marion had received all her routine immunisations as well as this year's flu vaccine.

"It's unfortunate there was a problem with last year's flu vaccine in children but I have confidence the problem has passed," Ms Turner said.

hbf HEALTH SURVEY

VACCINATION

I have confidence immunisations are mostly safe

90% agree	2011
76% agree	2010

People who do not immunise their children are irresponsible

67% agree	2011
55% agree	2010

The seasonal fu vaccine is not safe for children

48% disagreed	2011
29% disagreed	2010

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Confident: Jen Turner with her eight-month-old baby Marion, who has been vaccinated. Picture: Ben Crabtree