If you have had your spleen removed (splenectomy) or have a spleen that isn’t working (hyposplenism) or were born without a spleen this newsletter is for you.

Our aim is to **remind you** to get booster doses of vaccines, check your antibiotic supplies and **stay informed**.

This service supports people who live in Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland. We provide education kits, individualised vaccine reports and reminders to have vaccinations. We wish to acknowledge the Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland Health Departments for our funding and support from Alfred Health and Monash Health.

We now have just under 9,500 people registered with us, this includes 25 children under the age of 5 years and the average age of registered people is 51 years.

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**ANNUAL INFLUENZA VACCINATION DUE!**

You are not at an increased risk of influenza (‘flu’) however you require this vaccine in order to reduce your chances of getting the ‘flu’. If you get the ‘flu’ you are more likely to get a secondary bacterial infection.

Same as last year: the Australian Government has funded TWO types of flu vaccines

1. **For people aged over 65 years of age** — “trivalent”
   The trivalent vaccine is for this age group. It has been shown to better stimulate the immune system of people in this age group to make protective antibodies.

2. **For people aged under 65 years of age** — “quadrivalent”
   When you see your GP to get the flu shot PLEASE use this time to also check if you are due any of your boosters or need to get the newly recommended “spleen vaccines”.

Check your vaccine card, Spleen Australia vaccine report or “Spleenie” App (currently only for Apple devices) or ring us if you are unsure what you are due to have.

**If you have had the flu diagnosed before getting the vaccine—you still need it!**

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**YOUR CHECK LIST for staying healthy**

- [ ] Seen GP for annual check up?
- [ ] Received these vaccines?
  - [ ] Pneumococcal conjugate = Prevenar 13
  - [ ] Pneumococcal polysaccharide = Pneumovax 23
  - [ ] Meningococcal conjugate ACWY = Menactra/Nimenrix/Menveo - 2 doses of one of these
  - [ ] Meningococcal B = Bexsero - 2 doses
- [ ] Taking a daily **“spleen antibiotic”**?
- [ ] Have an emergency supply of antibiotics?
- [ ] Spleen alert card in your wallet/purse?
- [ ] Downloaded the Spleen App (currently Apple devices only)
- [ ] Need help? Call us
Please go to our website for the latest medical recommendations, these are updated annually or when necessary - the latest one is dated June 2019.

We have some new advice for people who have reported an allergy to penicillin. This is currently being discussed—read updates.

Patient story - Lyndel Cowley
If only Lyndel had known about her risk of overwhelming post splenectomy infection (OPSI) Lyndel had a splenectomy in 1980 for treatment of Hodgkin Lymphoma. In July 2018, Lyndel started feeling unwell. She was found at home unconscious 48 hours after last being seen by a friend. She was diagnosed with a severe pneumococcal infection (sepsis) and was admitted to ICU and an OPSI was diagnosed. Her family was informed that she only had a 10% chance of surviving. Lyndel had blackened hands and feet, which can be a consequence of severe sepsis, and needed to have 4 limbs amputated. She has had 10 surgical procedures, 3 months in hospital and 3 months in rehab. Lyndel has survived this ordeal. She has four prostheses and is walking now. Her family have incurred the costs of many out of pocket expenses. Lyndel is very keen for people without a spleen to be registered with Spleen Australia - so pass on this recommendation.

Staff changes - Undoubtedly you will know who has helped you by their voice or name.
Farewell and thank you to Julia McNamara and Kate Wall
Julia, after nearly 8 years was integral in establishing the service but has decided to leave to help care for her elderly parents. Her organisational skills will be missed by the Spleen Team. Many patients have benefitted from her kindness.
Kate, after 2 years, has left to work at the Royal Children’s Hospital. Kate offered lots of support around immunisations.
Hello to Natasha Asgari and Abshiro Hujale
Natasha joined us in October 2018. She has a critical care nursing qualification, extensive experience in respiratory medicine and has been brilliant picking up the complex nature of our work. Tash has also acquired an immunisation qualification. Abshiro joined us in April 2019. She has extensive nursing experience in caring for people with infectious diseases. She is completing her Masters in Public Health and Tropical Medicine, has an immunisation qualification and is passionate about infectious diseases and global health.
Back soon: Cate Bunn had her second baby — little Joe Henry and will return early 2020.

Want to know 4 cool things about the spleen?
Queensland Health have a great link regarding the spleen
1. It’s a filter
2. It has a role in fighting bacteria
3. It can expand and contract as the need arises
4. You can live without functioning spleen - especially if you are registered with us!

Spleen Australia’s key messages -
This YouTube clip is a summary of our program
THE SPLEEN SONG
Google - “The spleen song Alfred hospital” and have a listen or click on the link
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzDYzqc6Wvl
Monash Health Spleen Patient Study continues – Improving Care After Splenectomy

In 2017, Sarah Luu, a medical student, and A/Prof Ian Woolley, Deputy Director Monash Infectious Diseases, recruited patients who had a splenectomy for a study assessing long-term outcomes.

They found that some patients after splenectomy for trauma might possibly have some ongoing spleen function. Sarah and Ian’s study also showed that platelets (blood cells that help with clotting), of patients were more “sticky” and are different to people with spleens. Sarah and Ian wish to invite more adult patients who have had a splenectomy especially for trauma prior to May 2018 into the study. Recruitment for this study will end by 30 June 2019.

If you are interested in helping, you will need to go to Monash Medical Centre, in Clayton, for one or possibly two visits. You will have a blood test and will receive any spleen vaccines that you need as per Spleen Australia’s recommendations. There is a small fee for the vaccines at Monash Medical Centre (MMC) but they are cheaper than receiving them via your GP. Contact Dr Ian Woolley on the MMC phone numbers below. Remember you will need a referral to see this specialist. Participants will be reimbursed for parking fees.

Cheaper vaccines for Victorians at Monash Health!

Monash Immunisation Service, based at Monash Medical Centre (MMC) in Clayton, is able to provide you with your “spleen vaccines”. Patients of all ages can attend. MMC patients will receive some vaccines for free and others will incur a fee of $39 per vaccine or pension/health care card $6 per item. You must provide a referral from your GP and you will see an infectious diseases doctor. This appointment is bulk billed. Fax your GP referral to 03 9594 6325 or call 9594 6320.

Adult Immunisation Register (AIR)

AIR is a national register that records vaccines given to people of all ages in Australia. It supersedes the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register (ACIR), which previously recorded the vaccination details of children from 0 to 7 years of age. All the information from the ACIR has now been rolled into the AIR.

Only a recognised vaccine provider such as your general practitioner can update the AIR. However, you can access your immunisations on the AIR by following the steps below.

- Go to my.gov.au
- Either sign in, or create an account.
- A code will be sent to your mobile which you have to input.
- Select the Services pull-down, and then select Medicare Linked.
- Proceed to your Online Account.
- Select Immunisation History Statement.
- Select your name, tick the Declaration box and View Statement.

And there is your immunisation history.

*Please note it may not be complete. Your GP may only be adding recent given vaccines to this site. We do our best to update AIR with vaccines you have received in the past.

Do you have a history of being allergic to penicillin?

Sometimes people have a history of being allergic to penicillin and it is not correct. It is very important that your doctors confirm this allergy. The reason we want this confirmed is - because if you become very unwell, a penicillin type antibiotic is a good one for you to be prescribed. In Victoria, Dr Trubiano has a clinic where he could confirm or remove this “label” from your medical history. [http://www.austin.org.au/infectious_diseases/clinics/antibiotic_allergy/](http://www.austin.org.au/infectious_diseases/clinics/antibiotic_allergy/). In Queensland RBWH has a service, you will need to ask your GP to call 07 3646 8761, and in Tasmania your GP could seek help with the infectious diseases doctors in the main teaching hospitals.

Spleen Australia’s SPLEEN APP is currently not working

We hope that it will be working early next year.

Please go to website for updates or call us

VIC & TAS patients—03 9076 3828 QLD 1800 775 336
Best wishes from us and hoping you have a healthy 2019!
Spleen Australia Team

How many people are registered with our service?

9391
How many people have had a splenectomy?

8326
Why have they had their spleen removed?

- Trauma 2662
- Blood diseases 2016
- Blood cancers 628
- Cancer 1021
- Not planned 733
- Other reasons 1266

How many of the 9,391 people have been diagnosed with a non functioning spleen (hyposplenism)?

487

Splenic artery embolisation
(a procedure that saves the person from having a splenectomy following trauma)

507
Incomplete 71

Detecting signs of a bacterial infection - if you have any of these symptoms please see a doctor and let them know you do not have a functioning spleen.

- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Can’t Get Warm
- Exhaustion
- Confusion
- Headaches

If you cannot see a doctor promptly, go to the local emergency department and take your emergency supply of antibiotics.

**People without a functioning spleen can get very sick, very quickly if you ignore these symptoms**

DONATIONS Spleen Australia needs your support
If you can help, please go to Alfred Hospital Foundation website https://www.alfredfoundation.org.au/donate-now/ and go to SLEEN AUSTRALIA link in “donation details”. You can also call The Alfred Foundation staff on (03) 9076 3222 to donate. Your donations are tax deductible. Thank you very much in advance!