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## Parents make a dash for jab cash

PARENTS who refuse to vaccinate their children are still pocketing thousands of dollars in Federal Government immunisation incentives.

**Renee Viellaris**

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Immunisation

PARENTS who refuse to vaccinate their children are pocketing thousands of dollars in Federal Government immunisation incentives.

Opponents to childhood vaccines say it is unfair to be denied Federal Government cash because of their beliefs, and are exploiting a loophole to claim more than \$2000 a child after registering as "conscientious objectors".

In July, the Gillard Government scrapped the \$129 Maternity Immunisation Allowance, a specific payment to encourage parents to have their children immunised.

In an attempt to boost immunisation rates, it has now linked vaccination incentives to Family Tax Benefit A \$2100 to be paid over three immunisation "check points" once children are fully immunised at ages one, two and five.

While parents have been warned they will lose their payment and the childcare benefit if they do not fully immunise their children, they are also being told exemptions will be given to objectors.

All they have to do to still receive the money is fill out a form supplied by the Federal Government.

The Federal Government's [Department of Human Services](#) website [outlines the immunisation requirements](#).

It reads: "To meet the immunisation requirements, children will need to be fully immunised, be on a recognised immunisation catch-up schedule, or have an approved exemption."

The exemption forms are available from the Department of Human Services website. They require signatures of the parent/guardian of the child and recognised immunisation provider a GP or family doctor.

Independent Senator [Nick Xenophon](#) said it was a bizarre policy.

"This is a case of everyone wins a prize. It's a bit like getting the Baby Bonus without having a baby," Senator Xenophon said.

"Anti-vaxers", as they call themselves, are now joining parenting forums to encourage others not to be bullied by the Government and to give tips on how to get objection forms lodged quickly.

One person on the controversial [Australian Vaccination Network](#) suggested: "Do not take the child to the appointment as it is for information gathering only.

"Have the Medicare form for conscientious objection already printed out (and) have your friend ready with a recording device in case the doctor starts to behave unprofessionally."

In the past eight months, the Government has granted more than 16,000 exemptions from conscientious objectors, children with immunity and families with legitimate medical reasons.

Queensland last year recorded 3432 cases of whooping cough and 133 cases of pneumococcal, vaccine-preventable diseases that still kill babies in Australia. Up to 10 per cent of Queensland children are not fully immunised.

### **For some it's a sticking point**

MICHELLE Burcin is like most mums. Baby spew is her latest eau de toilette and multi-tasking has become a lifestyle.

However, unlike other mums, there's one thing missing from her busy schedule: dates and times for immunisations.

The Cairns mother of one and former primary school teacher is an "anti-vaxer" and refuses to be swayed by the majority.

She chose not to vaccinate 12-month-old son James after doing her own research about immunisations and wants him to build his immune system naturally.

She is a registered conscientious objector and has no problem telling people James is not immunised.

"People don't understand it. It's a parent's choice and I think that's why people don't discuss it with me," Mrs Burcin said.

It's a stance accepted by Brisbane physiotherapist and mother of three, Tanya deKroo.

"I think people should have the choice. It's a medical intervention and is not without risk," Mrs deKroo said.

"But the risk is so minimal, so it was a no-brainer (that the children would be vaccinated).

"Everything you do, you're trying to keep your kids in good health. If there are diseases that are easily preventable (by having a jab), it was really not a difficult decision for me."

Some doctors interviewed by *The Sunday Mail* said they privately believed vaccinations should be mandatory. However, they conceded that it would never happen because of the controversy.

They said some members of the public were being confused by the "ludicrous" information published by anti-vaccination groups.

The Australian Vaccination Network, which says it offers the other side of debate to pro-vaccinators, has listed 10 reasons why parents choose not to immunise their children, including: "vaccines have never been tested, doctors and health professionals rarely, if ever, report vaccine reactions", and that some childhood illnesses "have beneficial aspects", such as the measles to help treat eczema.

Doctors dispute the claims.

**What do you think? Tell us in the comments box below, email [yournews@thesundaymail.com.au](mailto:yournews@thesundaymail.com.au) or write to us at GPO Box 130, Brisbane, 4001.**

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