

Vaccine dodgers win big

RENEE VIELLARIS

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 per child after registering as "conscientious objectors".

In July, the government scrapped the Maternity Immunisation Allowance — a specific payment to encourage parents to give their kids the jab.

Official objectors, who asked doctors to sign exemption forms, also demanded and received the payment.

The government has now linked vaccination incentives to Family Tax Benefit A — \$2100 to be paid over three "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 dodge the requirements and receive

the money is fill out a form.

Parents of more than 23,000 children were cut off from child care benefit payments between July 2011 to March this year after failing to meet vaccination requirements.

“This is a case of everyone wins a prize. It's a bit like getting the baby bonus without having a baby”

None were official objectors.

The exemption forms are available from the Department of Human Services website and require signatures of the parent and a GP.

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.

If questioned by their doc-

tor, anti-vaccination parents are being told to record their appointment on film or audio device and coached to say things such as: "I don't see why we should be discriminated against", and "vaccination is not compulsory in Australia (and) ... the government has unethically linked to welfare payments".

A spokeswoman for Families Minister Jenny Macklin did not comment on why parents were getting incentives for not meeting requirements, but said immunisation was essential for the health of children.

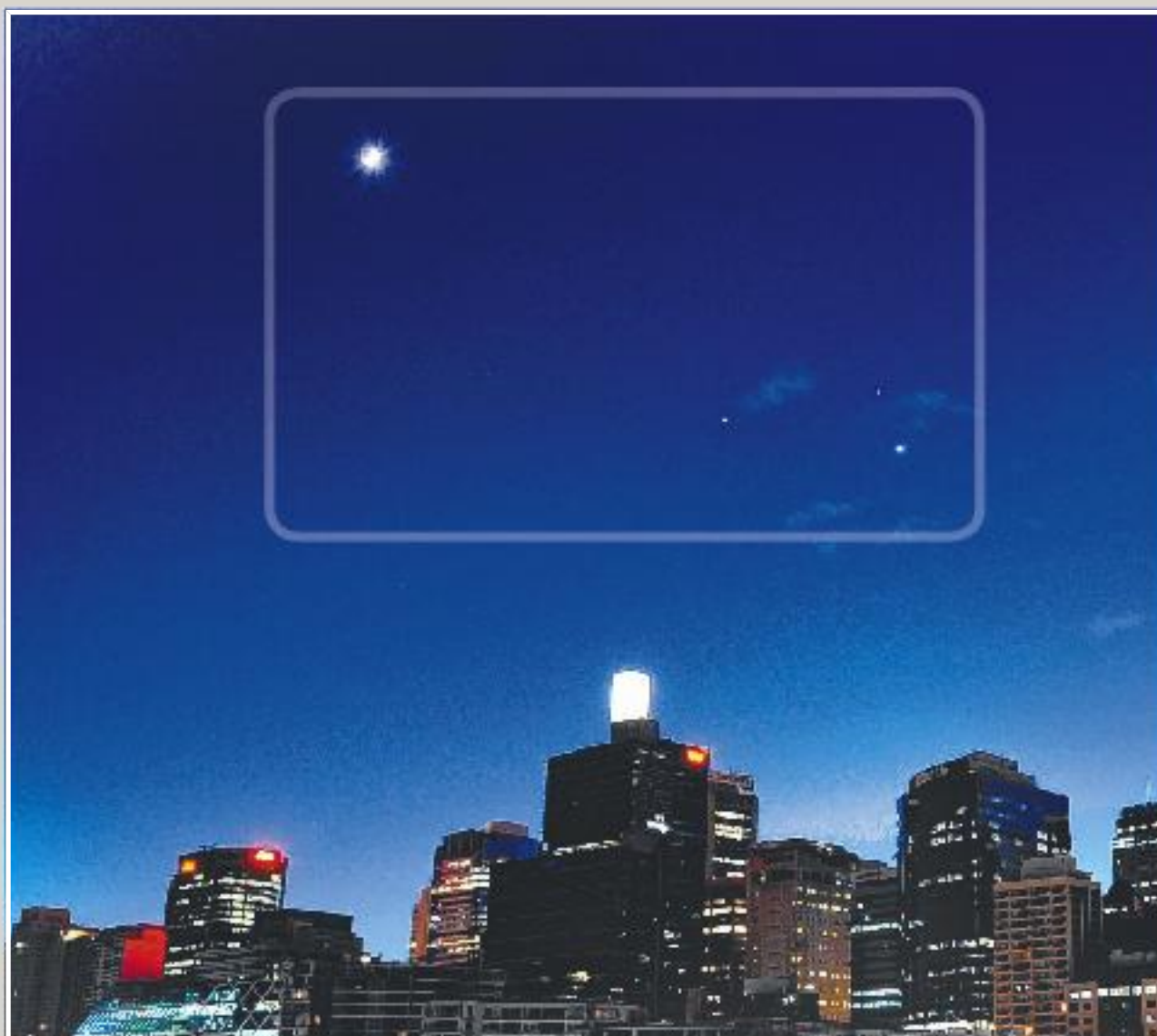
"The Australian Government has reformed Australia's

childhood immunisation arrangements to increase the immunisation rates of Australian children over time," the spokeswoman said.

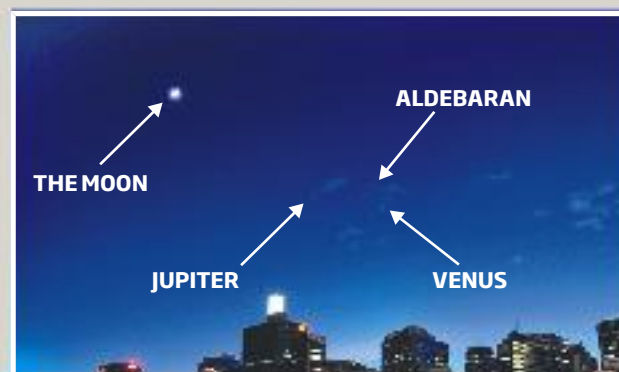
"These new requirements provide stronger incentives for parents to get their children immunised."

The Australian Medicare Local Alliance, which represents community GPs, has criticised the changes.

ONLINE
DO YOU THINK ANTI-VACCINE PARENTS SHOULD GET PAID?
thetelegraph.com.au



A rare event and a thrill for stargazers sees the planets Venus and Jupiter and the star Aldebaran clearly visible in the sky, with the moon, early on Saturday morning, highlighted above and explained at right. Picture: Gordon McComiskie



Stars put on amazing show across our sky

BRIANA DOMJEN

LIGHTING up the early morning sky, the heavens are putting on a stellar display for stargazers thanks to a rare alignment of the planets and the moon.

This picture, taken as dawn broke over Sydney, does not do justice to the stunning sight of Venus and Jupiter, which we will not see again so close together for the next few years.

However, the good news for budding astronomers who may have missed the early morning show, is the best is yet to come.

Because of the rare alignment of the moon with the two planets — tomorrow will be the clearest display yet.

Allan Kreuter, Astronomy Educator Sydney Observatory,

which is part of the Powerhouse Museum said: "If you look to the north-east before sunrise you will see the spectacular sight."

"The two planets are at their brightest and you will also see other bright stars."

"The best time to look will be around 6am and you will see the crescent moon low to the horizon, directly above it is the brightest planet Venus. Above Venus and to the left is the largest of the planets, Jupiter which will appear slightly dimmer. Just above them both will be the bright star Aldebaran."

Another star to look out for is the red star, Betelgeuse.

Although tomorrow morning will be the best time to view the planets, they will be putting on their display for the next few weeks.

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