

THIMEROSOL, USE AS A PRESERVATIVE IN VACCINES

1062. Hon Jim Scott to the Parliamentary Secretary representing the Minister for Health

- (1) When did the WA Health Department permit the use of thimerosal as a preservative in vaccinations in Western Australia?
- (2) Is thimerosal still used as a preservative in vaccines in Western Australia?
- (3) If not, why was it removed?
- (4) What are the constituents of the preservative thimerosal?

Hon SUE ELLERY replied:

- (1) “Thimerosal” is the American term for “thiomersal”, a mercury-containing anti-bacterial and anti-fungal preservative that has been used in vaccines since the 1930s.
- (2) Thiomersal is contained in the following vaccines: Combined diphtheria-tetanus vaccine (CDTTM), Adult diphtheria-tetanus vaccine (ADTTM), Diphtheria vaccine, Hepatitis B (Engerix-BTM Paediatric and Adult), Hepatitis B (H-B-Vax IITM Adult), Influenza vaccines (FluarixTM, FluvaxTM), Japanese encephalitis vaccine (JE-VaxTM), and Q fever vaccine (Q-VaxTM). All vaccines on the current Australian Standard Vaccination Schedule for children under five years of age are free of thimerosal, except for the monovalent hepatitis B vaccine (Engerix B paediatric) which has a reduced amount.
- (3) Despite the lack of evidence that thiomersal in vaccines is harmful, it is being phased out for two main reasons. Firstly, to reduce exposure to mercury in very small premature babies with low body weight in whom there was a theoretical risk that their mercury intake from vaccines could have been high. Secondly, to reduce the total exposure to mercury in babies and young children.
- (4) Thiomersal is the sodium salt of (2-carboxyphenylthio) ethylmercury (C₉H₉HgNaO₂S), an organic compound containing 49.6% mercury by weight.