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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, SKY News, *with Ashleigh Gillon*,  
 Tuesday 10 July 2018

**Subject:** Breastfeeding, MMR Vaccine in Samoa, Successful Flu Vaccine Campaign

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**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** The US President, Donald Trump, has defended his administration's efforts to reportedly undermine a World Health Organization measure, in support of breastfeeding. A *New York Times* report claimed US officials fought against language that all governments should protect, promote, and support breastfeeding. Joining us live now is Dr Tony Bartone; he's the President of the Australian Medical Association.

Appreciate your time, Tony. Is the US stance on breastfeeding more a tell-tale sign, perhaps, of the global power of the formula lobby? And are you pleased the President has at least tried to clarify this position, pointing out that the US does in fact strongly support breastfeeding?

**TONY BARTONE:** Good morning, Ash. Look, this has really been very bizarre, you'd have to say that where commercial interests have tried to sort of get in the way of a very good and very strong and very appropriate public health messaging opportunity. We know that breastfeeding, where is possible, is the best alternative. It's not always possible but, of course, it's the best first option available. And the interference by commercial lobbyists on behalf of infant formula manufacturers was concerning, to say the least. And really, we need to be sure that when we're talking public health messaging; it's the medical experts talking and leave the commercial interests out to one side. Because they don't have a role to play here.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Yeah, it seems to have been one that stunned medical professionals right around the world.

Tony, still overseas, we've seen what is pretty- an alarming story, this morning, out of Samoa. The country has now stopped a vaccination program after two babies died shortly after being immunised. The vaccine was the MMR vaccine, it guards against measles, mumps, and rubella. Now, we know that babies here in Australia have an MMR vaccine as well. Is it the same one that Samoa has and are there any concerns about our program here?

**TONY BARTONE:** I've been in contact with the Chief Medical Officer. And they're still trying to get information on exactly the backstory on this unfortunate course of events that's occurred in the Samoan hospital. But it's important to understand that we've got all the- and all the safety precautions in place. Our MMR vaccine here that we're every day in doctors' surgeries and other infant welfare centres around the country is extremely safe, has been thoroughly tested and obviously we just need to have more information about what's the unfortunate events that have occurred in Samoa. But really the message is please understand vaccination is very safe, it's very appropriate and everyone should still continue with their appointments as currently planned.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Are you worried that anti-vaxxers might seize on this latest case in Samoa?

**TONY BARTONE:** Look, I'm sure that any opportunity that they have that comes their way, they'll jump on and use it as information or as a material for their campaign. But we still don't

know what's occurred in these unfortunate events. It's highly unlikely that it's as is being reported but we still do need to get that information. And until we do, we can continue the immunisation program as currently planned.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Speaking of immunisations, are flu shot stocks back up now around the country? I know just a few weeks ago I had to call around to, I think it was about four of five different chemists to buy the vaccine for my daughter after the GP ran out of the flu shot. Labor has been arguing in recent weeks that the Government's handling of the flu stock situation has really left a lot to be desired.

**TONY BARTONE:** Look, let's be very clear, what's happened here is, there's been an enormous success of a campaign to get everyone to get their flu vaccine on the back of a horror season last year. So, we've had a really successful uptake in demand, as much as nearly 30 per cent more immunisations this year than last year. And so, that's a good news story. It's really hard to predict that kind of successful increase in demand. And so, what the authorities have done have made sure that even right now as we speak, another- almost another million doses of influenza vaccination are coming online very, very shortly in the next few days or week, which will really bolster the shortfall, especially in that 18 to 65-year gap. We know that nearly 85 per cent of the people over 65 eligible for that free flu vaccine have had that, that's an enormous successful uptake. And there's still stocks of that particular vaccine that you can find if you ring your doctor and- or hunt around. We've got plenty of the stock of the under three year olds available as well.

So, it's really that unfortunately because of a horror season last year, we've had a very successful campaign; people heeded the message very quickly. And I think there's some lessons to be learned about timing and logistics. But really ... obviously there are other things that you need to do to keep your risk of getting influenza down. It's still not too late to have your vaccination, so please contact your doctor and work out - if you haven't had it yet - how you can go about getting it.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Just finally, Dr Tony Bartone, are we expecting the same sort of horrific season coming up? I think the peak is September, isn't it?

**TONY BARTONE:** Look, the peak can be anywhere from July to September or maybe just beyond there. They're the peak four months of the year. It's always hard to predict flu seasons; they don't always come in succession. You usually get a bit of reprieve and then we become a bit lax and a bit complacent and then we're reminded and jolted back into reality. So, it's always a timely message: be prepared and be vigilant.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** AMA President Dr Tony Bartone, always appreciate your time. Thanks for joining us.

**TONY BARTONE:** Thank you.

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