

# Australian Medical Association Limited

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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, ABC Radio, *PM*, Wednesday, 28 March 2019

**Subject:** Vaccination; Updated advice to doctors on conscientious objection

**LINDA MOTTRAM:** The Australian Medical Association says the continuing pattern of measles outbreaks globally is alarming, backing the idea of a new public campaign to promote vaccination. The doctors' lobby group has also today updated advice to doctors on conscientious objection to certain treatments. Dr Tony Bartone is the AMA President. We spoke first about measles.

**TONY BARTONE:** For a significant period of time, we've been hearing about outbreaks at regular intervals and this pattern is continuing, quite alarmingly so. And it's a message that we continue to prosecute - and that is that everyone should ensure that their vaccination is up to date; ensure that they are doing what they can to promote a message that vaccination is safe and vaccination is appropriate to our children, to our community, and that vaccination does save lives. Many diseases - and measles is one of them - have over time become silent memories of past epidemics, and now we're seeing the evidence of what can occur when we take certain outcomes for granted.

**LINDA MOTTRAM:** Are there risks that the disease will spread here in Australia as dramatically as it has in countries like the Philippines and some parts of the United States?

**TONY BARTONE:** Overall, Australia has achieved significant vaccination targets, but there are pockets in Australia where vaccination levels, vaccination coverage, is worryingly lower than would be considered best practice. Messages of anti-vaxxers across the board are having an effect, where pockets in particular refuse or resist the move to vaccinate their children. These provide the necessary opportunities for the disease to occur and to spread. We need to ensure that the vaccination levels in the community are at - at least - significant levels to prevent outbreaks occurring. But in some pockets, that is worryingly at risk.

**LINDA MOTTRAM:** We've been hearing that even those who do accept the importance of vaccination can be susceptible to anti-vaccination messages. I mean, is it time for a major new public health campaign perhaps around those messages?

**TONY BARTONE:** There is no doubt in my mind that a significant public health campaign around the importance and the safety of vaccination is more than appropriate.

**LINDA MOTTRAM:** Just on another issue, the AMA has also today released updated advice to doctors with conscientious objections to providing certain care options, stressing that doctors must never use an objection to intentionally impede patients' access to care. I mean, the obvious example is abortion. Is patient access being impeded and how frequently?

**TONY BARTONE:** I don't have specific details of the where and the how many occasions it does occur. But what's important is that this announcement today was an opportunity just to ensure that we've taken a more reflective approach on the importance of what really does matter - and that is the impact of our decisions on our patients in front of us at the point of care.

**LINDA MOTTRAM:** I mean, was there a concern that you were hearing more examples of doctors not behaving in that way?

**TONY BARTONE:** It's not so much that it's a concern that we're hearing more examples, but it's just updating the language and the nuance around a Position Statement that was on our books and we regularly review at periodic intervals. It's taking a more contemporaneous approach, reflecting and respecting the values and the importance of treating our patients as equals, and having an important relationship in that doctor-patient relationship in terms of the information transfer and shared decision-making that goes into that process.

**LINDA MOTTRAM:** Tony Bartone, thank you very much for speaking with us.

**TONY BARTONE:** Thank you very much.

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