

Chickenpox response 'inadequate'

By **DAVID COHEN**

The state opposition has criticised the government for not doing more after it was notified about a woman who infected her son with chickenpox.

The doctors' union said the woman's action was extremely misguided and people who infected others with a disease were foolish.

In late November, Padbury mother Wendy Elphinstone wrote on the Australian Vaccination Network's (AVN) Facebook page that she had exposed her son to chickenpox.

"I am glad my son got chickenpox, instead of shingles, or adult pox, they need to get these infections for long life immunity and strength, I did deliberately expose him lol ..." Ms Elphinstone posted.

The post was deleted after the POST called her.

"How did you know that?" she asked, before refusing to answer questions and hanging up.

Ken McLeod, from Stop the AVN, wrote to Child Protection Minister Robyn McSweeney the day Ms Elphinstone wrote her post.

Mr McLeod described the AVN as a "rabid anti-vaccination group". He said chickenpox caused shingles in adults and there were effective vaccines for the disease.

"Surely this constitutes a deliberate assault, as defined in the WA Criminal Code," Mr McLeod said.

A week after Mr McLeod sent his letter, Ms McSweeney's chief of staff Kevin Humsfrey referred him to Health Minister Kim Hames' office.

Three weeks after that, Dr Hames' chief of staff Ian Wight-Pickin wrote to Mr McLeod.

"It is true that chickenpox infection earlier in life leads to a lower rate of complications than when infected as an adult," Mr Wight-Pickin said.

"Immunisation against chickenpox not only prevents the discomfort of the primary disease but it lessens the risk of severe complications of the disease.

"The WA Department of Health believes the existing approach of providing the public with accurate information on vaccine-preventable diseases is the preferred strategy.

"Fortunately, people with extreme views on immunisation, are in a small minority."

A WA Police spokeswoman said police had no comment on whether the infection was assault and enquiries should be directed to the Child Protection Department.

AMA WA president Dave Mountain said infecting a child with chickenpox was very uncomfortable and unpleasant for the child.

"A significant number end up with complications and a small number end up with encephalitis," Dr Mountain said.

"There are a whole bunch of urban myths out there on vaccination, put out by people with no realistic or good information."

Opposition for child protection spokeswoman Sue Ellery said it was a lazy government that buck-passed so blatantly on such an important issue.

"Labor and the government both support vaccination of children, given it is government policy - one of those ministers should have taken the initiative to respond properly," Ms Ellery said.

"The minister's office should have taken the opportunity to highlight in the media once more the very real risks of not vaccinating, not just to that child but all those that the child comes in contact with."

Youth awards open

Nominations are open for this year's WA Youth Awards.

Youth Minister Robyn McSweeney said anyone could nominate a young person between 12 and 25 for the eight awards.

Category winners will win \$2000, and the WA Young Person of the Year will get two return tickets to Europe.

Last year's Young Person of the Year, 25-year-old Peter Darch, was recognised for advocating for people with disabilities and helping disadvantaged young people.

For an entry form, see communities.wa.gov.au/youth or call 6551 8700.