



## CASE REPORT

- |                               |                                  |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Complaint reference number | 144/09                           |
| 2. Advertiser                 | Dept of Health Western Australia |
| 3. Product                    | Community Awareness              |
| 4. Type of advertisement      | TV                               |
| 5. Nature of complaint        | Other - Social values            |
| 6. Date of determination      | Wednesday, 22 April 2009         |
| 7. DETERMINATION              | Dismissed                        |

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement commences with a sick looking child appearing behind the television screen. After several seconds, she sneezes. The sneeze covers the inside of the screen with droplets of snot.

Screen fades to white, we hear the young girl sneeze again, as she sneezes the superimpose displays the words "Your screen just came between you and the flu".

The young girl is heard to sneeze again, as she sneezes, the second superimpose displays the words "Free flu vaccine for kids under 5. See your GP"

## THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

*It's unnecessary to be so graphic. It's totally disgusting, nauseating and offensive.*

*This ad makes me and my family and i'm sure many other people physically sick, the first time i saw it i was eating dinner and couldn't eat anymore. Everytime it comes on we switch the channel.*

*Do you think it's good to have a child sneeze in your face as you are just sitting down to dinner? I have never seen anything so disgusting.*

*It is not necessary to show such a REVOLTING and DISGUSTING thing on TV to advertise the fact that people need to have the flu vaccine. Who in their right minds wants to see runny green mucus running down a pane of glass ??? Especially when it is dinner time ?*

*It is repulsive to watch with phlem on the screen.*

## THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complaint/s regarding this advertisement included the following:

*Thank you for your email regarding the complaints you have received in relation to our Flu campaign. I am pleased to provide you with the following information in response:*

*In 2008, the Department of Health WA ran a vaccination campaign targeted at parents of young children, six months up to five years of age. The campaign had a dramatic impact on disease rates in Western Australia and has since influenced national policy. The outcomes included:*

*§ A nearly 50% decrease in influenza notifications in the vaccinated age from 224 in 2007 to 124,*

*despite equivalent influenza seasons.*

*§ A decrease in influenza notifications in the elderly, lending weight to the theory of a herd immunity effect of childhood vaccinations (protection of grandparent carers)*

*§ A recommendation by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, that all children under five years should be vaccinated with influenza vaccine. This recommendation, which was based largely on WA results, has been referred to the National Immunisation Committee for discussion on implementation.*

*The 2008 campaign also had a health etiquette component aimed at the general public on how to avoid catching and passing on the flu which ran in June and July.*

*The aim of the 2009 campaign is to build on the outcomes of the previous year and provide for a case control study to look at cost effectiveness and herd immunity impacts of child vaccination. It is anticipated that, as a consequence of vaccinating children, influenza notifications across the entire WA population will be reduced (from 2008 figures) and presentations at hospital emergency departments due to flu associated complications will be reduced.*

*The 2009 campaign comprises advertising for television, radio, press and outdoor. The television commercial (TVC) was researched as part of the campaign development. Focus group testing, conducted with parents, resulted in a recommendation for a strong reminder to parents of the importance of flu vaccination. Group responses to the TVC were that it was highly memorable and entertaining and would get people talking.*

*The campaign is currently running. The television advertising activity has now finished, but radio, press and outdoor advertising activity continues until early May. Whilst there is an understanding that some people may find the TVC disgusting, it graphically communicates an important message. It was well received by the target audience during testing and is intended to strongly motivate action which will result in a tangible benefit across the WA population. It's success in reducing the incidence of flu both in children and the broader population will not be evident until the latter half of 2009, but indications from the 2008 vaccination campaign are extremely positive.*

*In addition to those received through yourselves, I have received a number of complaints about the TVC. I have explained the information above to those complainants that I have spoken with and while some would still prefer that a less graphic communication was used, they have all conceded that it is both impactful and memorable, and support the intent behind it.*

## **THE DETERMINATION**

The Advertising Standards Board ("Board") considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the "Code").

The Board noted the complainants' concerns that the advertisement's depiction of a child with flu symptoms sneezing onto the screen was unpleasant, overly graphic and offensive.

The Board agreed that some members of the public may find the advertisement unpleasant or offensive, but noted its intention to provide an important health message.

The Board did not find anything in the advertisement that contravened any particular section of the Code and therefore dismissed the complaints.