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Minnesota Public Health Advocates Urge Parents to Get Their Kids Vaccinated Before School Starts

Minnesota reporting high numbers of whooping cough

MINNEAPOLIS – This year, the United States is on pace to have the most cases of pertussis, or whooping cough, in five decades. There have been 18,000 reported cases this year, according to the CDC. Minnesota is one of the states reporting high numbers of the bacterial disease that is preventable by vaccines.

A group of medical and educational organizations in Minnesota are collaborating to send a simple, but extremely important message to parents: Get your children vaccinated before the school year starts. The Children's Physician Network, Minnesota Medical Association, Minnesota Head Start Association, Immunization Action Coalition, and the School Nurse Organization of Minnesota are working together to raise awareness as part of August's National Immunization Awareness Month.

"Children under the age of one are the ones most likely to suffer serious complications and even death from pertussis," said Dr. Peter Dehnell of the Children's Physician Network. "About 50% of babies who get it are hospitalized."

Minnesota child wellness experts report that an increasing number of parents are delaying or skipping immunizations for their infants and children. While Minnesota's school immunization laws ensure that most students are vaccinated, some parents in the state are opting out. Schools are highly susceptible to outbreaks of infectious diseases such as influenza, whooping cough, meningitis, and measles because students can easily transmit illnesses to one another as a result of poor hand washing, uncovered coughs, and dense populations in schools.

"Immunization is one of the greatest success stories in public health and one of the best decisions parents can make to protect their children," said Dr. Dehnell. "For families that have fallen behind the recommended schedule, it is never too late to get caught up."

Many parents have never witnessed the damaging effects of vaccine-preventable disease. As a result, they are not aware of the importance of getting vaccinated. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), routine child immunizations in the United States prevent an estimated 33,000 deaths and save \$43 billion in societal costs each year.

The need to maintain high vaccination rates is not limited to young children. While the majority of recommended immunizations are administered early in life, experts say many parents often overlook recommended vaccines for their teenagers and themselves. Most Minnesota clinics are part of a program called Minnesota Vaccines for Children (MnVFC), which will cover the cost of the vaccines for children through age 18 who are on medical assistance or are uninsured. MnVFC distributes about \$39 million worth of vaccines to public and private clinics in Minnesota each year.

“Parents need to vaccinate their teenagers for the diseases of meningitis, influenza, and whooping cough,” said Mary B. Heiman, president of the School Nurse Organization of Minnesota. “There is a lot of attention focused on childhood vaccinations, but it’s equally important for teens to be immunized through the age of 18 in order to protect themselves and their peers.”

Immunization schedules

The CDC’s recommended immunization schedule includes:

- For children from birth through six years old: DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis), IPV (polio), MMR (measles, mumps, rubella), varicella (chicken pox), PCV (pneumococcal disease), hepatitis A and hepatitis B, rotavirus, influenza, and Haemophilus (Hib)
- For children ages 7 to 18: Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis), MCV (meningococcal), influenza, and HPV (human papillomavirus).

Where to get vaccinated

- Doctors’ offices/medical clinics
- Hospitals
- Urgent care facilities (not all)
- Walk-in clinics (not all)
- Health departments (not all)

Getting vaccines at the right ages is important, but it is never too late to catch up. Please see the official recommendations for children and teenagers at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/downloads/child/0-18yrs-11x17-fold-pr.pdf>

Minnesotans may also call the Minnesota Department of Health at 800-657-3970 or 651-201-5503.

About the Children's Physician Network

Children's Physician Network is an 11-county pediatric clinician network aiming to improve the health status of children and adolescents, serve patients in all health plans, and unify the community behind pediatric healthcare issues. The network is comprised of more than 175 primary care clinicians, more than 500 specialty clinicians, Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota, and Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare. Primary care clinicians serve pediatric patients living in the Twin Cities metropolitan area through more than 40 clinic locations; specialty clinicians through more than 400 locations. The clinics range from one to 40 practitioners, and most of them are independent, community-based practices.

About the Minnesota Medical Association

The Minnesota Medical Association (MMA) is a nonprofit professional association representing physicians, residents, and medical students, working together for a healthy Minnesota. With more than 10,000 members, the MMA is a powerful advocate on healthcare issues at the state Capitol and in Washington, D.C. Find the MMA online at mnmed.org.

About the Minnesota Head Start Association

The Minnesota Head Start Association is a private nonprofit membership organization dedicated exclusively to providing more than 15,000 income-eligible families and their children under age five with comprehensive family and child development services. Head Start represents more than 1 million children nationally, advocating for policies that strengthen services by providing extensive training and professional development to Head Start staff and by developing and disseminating research, information and resources that enrich Head Start program delivery.

About the Immunization Action Coalition

The Immunization Action Coalition's (IAC) immunization educational tools have a strong impact on the education, attitudes and practices of healthcare professionals throughout the nation, making the IAC one of the most respected and relied-upon immunization organizations in the United States. The IAC is also a direct source of immunization information for the public. The IAC's two major websites receive more than 20,000 visits per day, and its e-mail news service broadcasts weekly immunization updates to more than 45,000 opt-in subscribers. IAC's new cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention helps sustain this premier source of U.S. immunization information.

About the School Nurse Organization of Minnesota

The School Nurse Organization of Minnesota (SNOM) advances excellence in school nursing practice to promote student health for student success. SNOM's mission is to elevate the quality and practice of school nursing through research, education and advocacy. Find SNOM online at minnesotaschoolnurses.org.

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