

NEWS RELEASE
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Vaccination key to helping prevent serious diseases

National Immunization Awareness Month is a reminder we need vaccines throughout our lives

(Lawrence, KS) – Back-to-school season is here. It's time for parents to gather school supplies and get sports physicals. It's also time to make sure children are up to date on their vaccines.

To celebrate the importance of immunizations for people of all ages — and make sure preteens and teens are protected with all the vaccines they need — the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department is joining with partners nationwide in recognizing August as National Immunization Awareness Month.

Vaccination is one of the best ways parents can protect infants, children and teens from potentially harmful diseases, including measles, meningitis and whooping cough. Vaccine-preventable diseases can be serious, may require hospitalization, or can even be deadly — especially in infants, older adults and people with weakened immune systems due to cancer and other health conditions.

“Getting vaccinated according to the recommended immunization schedule is one of the most important things a parent can do to protect their child’s health,” said Clinic Supervisor Kathy Colson, of the Health Department. “If you haven’t done so already, now is the time to check with your child’s health care provider to find out what vaccines your child needs.”

Child care facilities, preschool programs, schools and colleges are prone to outbreaks of infectious diseases. Children in these settings can easily spread illnesses to one another due to poor hand washing, not covering their coughs and other factors such as interacting in crowded environments.

Douglas County Health Officer Dr. Thomas Marcellino, of Mt. Oread Family Practice, said vaccines are the safest and most effective way to prevent diseases. They not only protect vaccinated individuals but also help protect entire communities by preventing and reducing the spread of infectious diseases. “I make sure my children are up to date on their vaccinations, and I strongly encourage my patients to do the same.”

Additionally, Marcellino reminds parents that preteens need three vaccinations at the ages of 11 or 12 and a yearly flu shot. Those vaccinations are:

- **Meningococcal conjugate vaccine**, which protects against four types of the bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. Meningococcal disease is an uncommon but serious disease that can cause infections of the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and blood (septicemia). Since protection decreases over time, a booster dose is recommended at age 16, so teens continue to have protection during the ages when they are at highest risk for getting meningococcal disease.
- **HPV vaccine**, which protects against the types of HPV that most commonly cause cancer. HPV can cause future cancers of the cervix, vulva and vagina in women and cancers of the penis in men. In both women and men, HPV also causes cancers in the back of the throat, anal cancer and genital warts.
- **Tdap vaccine**, which protects against tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough. Tetanus and diphtheria are uncommon now because vaccines have worked so well, but they can be very serious. Whooping cough is common and on the rise in the U.S. It can keep kids out of school and activities for weeks, but it is most dangerous — and sometimes even deadly — for babies who can catch it from family members, including older siblings.

Additionally, teens and young adults, ages 16 through 23, are encouraged to receive a serogroup B meningococcal vaccine.

“As children get older, they are at increased risk for some infections. Plus, the protection provided by some of the childhood vaccines begins to wear off,” Marcellino said. “So, it’s important to get your preteens vaccinated.”

For the 2018-19 Kansas School Immunization requirements, visit ldchealth.org/immunizations.

Immunizations are available on a walk-in basis at the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department during clinic hours. No appointment is necessary. Parents are encouraged to bring their children’s immunizations records with them.

The Health Department participates in the Vaccines for Children Program, which allows the department to provide vaccines at no cost to children who are uninsured or if their insurance doesn’t cover vaccinations. Parents must bring written proof from the insurance company if vaccinations are not covered.