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Adult Vaccines Protect You, Your Family and Community

Kingsford, Michigan – December 28, 2011. While it is important to ensure that all children are completely immunized, adults also should make sure that they are up-to-date on recommended vaccines. During this time of New Year's resolutions, make a promise to yourself to get caught up on any vaccines you may be missing.

We have all heard our doctor tell us to get a tetanus booster shot every 10 years because our immunity wears off (or after five years if you get a tetanus-prone injury). The tetanus shot you've been getting actually protects you against both tetanus and diphtheria. Now, because of the return of the communicable disease pertussis (whooping cough) across the country, it is recommended that teens and adults receive one tetanus shot that includes a booster for pertussis as well. This shot is called the Tdap (for tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis).

The Tdap is particularly important if you are around infants who are the most vulnerable to serious infection and hospitalization. Every year, infants are hospitalized with pertussis which can be severe enough to cause them to turn blue with coughing, have seizures, or even die from the disease. Most adults with pertussis develop a prolonged, severe cough, but older adults and those with other serious health conditions can become very ill with pertussis.

For some time, people over 65 years of age or those who have serious chronic conditions such as diabetes or heart disease, have known that it is important to get a 'pneumonia' shot. The national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices now recommends that adults 19-64 years of age who are smokers or have asthma also get the vaccine. Studies have shown that just like older adults and those with health

problems, smokers and asthmatics are at higher risk for serious pneumococcal infections, even if they are young and otherwise healthy.

Gardasil is the new vaccine to prevent infection with the most serious strains of human papillomavirus (HPV). More than 50% of men and women are infected with this sexually transmitted virus at some time in their lives. In its mildest form, HPV may cause no symptoms or cases of genital warts, but the most severe strains can actually cause cervical or anal cancer. It is estimated that more than 70% of cervical cancer cases may be prevented through this vaccine. Young men and women between 11 and 26 years of age should be vaccinated to reduce their risk of cervical cancer, genital warts and anal cancer.

Another vaccine preventable disease is shingles. It is a painful rash, often with blisters. Rarely, it can cause pneumonia, hearing problems, brain infection or even death. Shingles is caused by a re-awakening of the chickenpox virus in the body's nerve cells. It is most common in older individuals or in those with weakened immune systems. If you live to be 85, you have about a 50-50 chance of developing shingles over your lifetime. The vaccine, Zostavax, reduces the risk of getting shingles by half and can also make the symptoms less painful if shingles occurs in spite of vaccination. The vaccine is recommended once for everyone age 60 and over.

And finally, it's not too late to get the seasonal influenza vaccine if you haven't done so this year.

The Health Department can bill Michigan Medicaid and most private health insurances for immunizations. If you do not have insurance coverage for immunizations, you may be eligible to receive free vaccines made available by the Michigan Department of Community Health and the American Recovery and Re-Investment Act. There is a \$15 administration fee per vaccine. The free vaccines available to adults are Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis; measles, mumps, rubella; Hepatitis A; Hepatitis B; Varicella (chickenpox); Pneumococcal; and HPV (Human Papillomavirus).

For more information or to schedule an appointment, call the Health Department at (906) 774-1868 or (906) 265-9913.

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