Immediate Release

**Start the School Year Right**

Kingsford, Michigan – August 1, 2011. Even as we enjoy the beautiful summer weather, it is not too early to think about making sure your child is ready for the new school year by updating his or her immunizations, stated Dr. Terry Frankovich, the Medical Director at the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department.

Lately, we have been hearing about increases in childhood illnesses that many of us had nearly forgotten about in the United States – particularly pertussis (whooping cough) and measles. Vaccines have been so effective at protecting us that often only our grandparents or great grandparents vividly remember losing friends and family to these infections and many others, such as polio, tetanus and diphtheria.

It is hard to imagine now, but before the measles vaccine arrived on the scene, nearly all children got measles by the time they were 15 years of age. Each year in the United States, about 450 to 500 people died because of measles, 48,000 were hospitalized, 7,000 had seizures, and about 1,000 suffered permanent brain damage or deafness. Even today, worldwide, there are estimated to be 20 million cases and 197,000 deaths caused by measles each year.

Similarly, because most of us have never known anyone with pertussis, we forget just how serious an illness it can be. In 1922, prior to the development of the vaccine, there were more than 107,000 reported cases and 5,100 deaths from pertussis in this country alone. Nationally, and here in the U.P., we have been seeing a resurgence of this disease in the last couple of years.

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So, which immunizations does your school-aged child need to stay healthy?

**4-6 years:** If your child has received a full set of infant/toddler vaccines, he would now need the DTap (diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus), MMR (measles, mumps, rubella), IPV (polio) and chickenpox vaccine. If you child has certain health issues, he may need some additional vaccines for protection. Your healthcare provider will advise you.

**11-12 years:** Your child will need a dose of Tdap (the “adult and big kid” version of the tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis vaccine) and a meningitis vaccine. The HPV vaccine is recommended for girls to help prevent cervical cancer. This vaccine is also available for boys to reduce the risk of genital warts. This HPV series is most effective when given at this earlier age, and completed before they become sexually active.

In addition, everyone at and over 6 months of age is recommended to receive a yearly flu shot to protect them from seasonal flu. Those at highest risk from flu include very young children, senior citizens, pregnant women and individuals with certain chronic health conditions.

It’s also important to remember that adults need to be up-to-date on their immunizations in order to protect themselves and the young children in their home. This is particularly true for pertussis since older children and adults may be the main source of exposure for infants too young to be fully immunized. Adults need only one booster dose of pertussis vaccine (Tdap), after their childhood series.

If you have concerns about vaccine safety, please don’t let misinformation guide your decision to vaccinate. For example, some parents delayed or declined the measles vaccine for their child because of concerns about a possible link to autism. Unfortunately, even though the research that first made this claim has been found to be fraudulent, it is hard to “un-ring the bell” and ensure that parents are making decisions based on good, credible science.

If children are unvaccinated, the entire population becomes more vulnerable, as illnesses that we thought were history start circulating anew. Get credible information from reputable sources such as www.michigan.gov/immunize and www.cdc.gov/vaccines, and talk to your healthcare provider or the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department at (906) 774-1868 or (906)265-9913.

There are many gifts you give your child over the years, but some of the most important and lasting are immunizations.

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