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School readiness: Don't forget immunizations

With school starting soon, health department staff are encouraging families to check school requirements and children's immunization records, then make appointments to get the recommended shots.

"In Nebraska, there are minimum immunization standards required for school attendance, both public and private. Students must be vaccinated to meet this minimum requirement but should also be vaccinated with all ACIP-recommended vaccinations to assure the best protection from vaccine preventable diseases" says Dorrann Hultman, RN, immunization clinic coordinator at SHDHD.

Immunization recommendations are made by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), a federal advisory committee established to provide guidance on the most effective means to prevent vaccine-preventable diseases.

Hultman says that vaccination protects people of all ages from diseases that cause illness, disability and death.

"Childhood diseases are not the only diseases that can be prevented with vaccines," said Hultman. "HPV vaccination protects against the types of human papillomavirus (HPV) most closely linked with cancer. All boys and girls should get this vaccine at age 11-12 when the immune response is strongest and before potential exposure to the virus," she said.

"Having high rates of vaccination is important for preventing spread of disease," said Michele Bever, SHDHD health director. "In the South Heartland District of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties, kindergarten vaccination rates are above 93% for all of the required immunizations. Overall Nebraska rates are above 95% and the national target is a vaccination rate at or above 95% for this age group – so we have some room to improve in our 4-county area."

Hultman said that concern over the cost of vaccines should not keep people from getting vaccinated. "Most health insurance covers vaccines and preventive care," she said.

"However, if your family does not have insurance, your insurance never covers vaccines, or you have Medicaid, then your children 0-18 years old qualify for vaccines through the Vaccine for Children Program offered through some clinics across the district and at South Heartland's Hastings/Adams County Immunization Clinic."

Hultman said that the adult Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) vaccine is also offered at the clinic for those who qualify.

The health department staff are encouraging residents to take time during August, which is National Immunization Awareness Month, to review each family member's shot record and make sure that everyone gets updated on recommended immunizations.

"Vaccinate to protect yourself, your family and your community," said Hultman.

The Hastings/Adams County clinic is held the first Thursday of each month from 12:00 pm - 6:00 pm at South Heartland District Health Department. Interested individuals may call 402-462-6211 or 1-877-238-7595 for an appointment or to find other immunization clinic locations. For more information on HPV, Tdap, and other immunizations, visit www.southheartlandhealth.org.
