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Back To School Immunizations: Recommended vs. Required

Why vaccinate? Vaccines are one of the top public health achievements of the past century. They have reduced or even eliminated many diseases that can have devastating effects on children, families and communities. In the early 1900's infectious diseases took a significant toll on the U.S. population. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 1920, nearly of 148,000 people were sickened with diphtheria and 13,170 deaths were reported. In the early 1950's an average of 16,316 cases of polio and 1,879 deaths from polio were reported each year.

"Vaccination not only protects the person getting the vaccine but also helps keep diseases from spreading to others," said Dorrann Hultman, Immunization Clinic Manager for South Heartland District Health Department "Because of vaccines, we can be thankful that most of us have never witnessed many of these diseases or their impact on families." Serious diseases are still out there and occur in other countries, Hultman said. It is possible for unvaccinated travelers who are infected to bring diseases to the U.S.

Hultman said that some parents are choosing not to vaccinate their children or are choosing to vaccinate but not following the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) schedule for vaccination. "It is important to point out that if we were to take away the protection given by vaccination, more people would become infected and spread the disease to others. Before long we would see epidemics that would lead to illness and death of many children. Only when most get vaccinated is the spread of disease contained."

Vaccination can protect children from 16 vaccine-preventable diseases: Diphtheria, Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib), Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Human Papillomavirus (HPV - a major cause of cervical, genital, throat and neck cancers), Influenza, Measles, Meningococcal, Mumps, Pertussis (Whooping Cough), Pneumococcal, Polio, Rotavirus, Rubella (German Measles), Tetanus and Varicella (Chicken Pox).

The ACIP develops recommendations on how to use vaccines to control disease in the United States. The ACIP is a group of medical and public health experts who work together with professional organizations including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and the American College of Physicians (ACP) to develop the annual childhood and adult immunization schedules. These recommendations are approved by the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

The State of Nebraska has School Immunization Rules and Regulations that must be followed for enrollment in school. Hultman said it is very important to understand that a child receiving only the minimum immunizations required for entry to school, will not be fully protected from all vaccine-preventable diseases.

The South Heartland District Health Department recommends giving your school age child the most protection by having him/her vaccinated with all ACIP recommended vaccines for his/her age, not just those required for admittance to school.

“Vaccinations can be expensive,” Hultman said “If your child does not have insurance coverage for vaccinations or has Medicaid and is between the ages of 0-18 years, he/she qualifies for the Vaccine for Children Program (VFC) and can receive no cost vaccination through South Heartland’s Hastings/Adams County Immunization Clinic.” Donations to help cover the cost of vaccine administration are welcome.

The Hastings/Adams County Immunization clinic is held the first Thursday of each month. There are also Vaccine for Children immunization clinics available in Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties. Parents may learn more about recommended versus required vaccinations, or schedule appointments by calling the SHDHD office at 1-877-238-7595.