

Vaccination = Protection for All Ages

National Immunization Awareness Month in August presents an opportune time to review the impact of vaccination, the school requirements for Nebraska students and the importance of immunization through all stages of life.

History tells us that vaccination has been overwhelmingly effective in preventing death from childhood diseases that once were present in this country. Today many of those diseases still exist outside of the U.S. With expanded access to travel, what once may have seemed a world away now has the potential to appear in our communities. This reinforces our ongoing commitment to ensure that all are protected. Vaccination is the key.

As children are preparing to start a new school year, what better time than now for parents, grandparents and family members to review shot records and get updated on immunizations needed for yourself and your family members? If you can't locate your shot records, call your doctor for a printout or visit the Nebraska State Immunization Information System (NESIIS) http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/nesiis_index.aspx.

Keeping up with vaccination schedules can be confusing, so reach out to your doctor or nurse, or a public health nurse at South Heartland District Health Department.

In Nebraska, immunizations are a requirement for school attendance, both public and private. Written proof of immunization must be provided to schools prior to students attending classes. Schools must keep current immunization records on students and submit them to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Immunization Program each year.

Beyond infectious disease control, if you were told there was a vaccine that could protect against cancer, would you get it for yourself and your kids? This vaccine does exist! It's the HPV vaccine, a three shot series that protects against the human papillomavirus types most closely linked with cancer. Your sons and daughters should get this vaccine starting at age 11-12 when immune response is strongest and before potential exposure to the virus. Young adults are at highest risk for HPV infection when they have intimate skin-to-skin contact if/when they begin experimenting with physical, oral/anal and sexual contact. Women age 13-26 and men age 13-21 need this vaccine series. It is important that individuals receive all 3 shots in the series.

HPV is a very common and dangerous virus. Don't let the fact that it is so common, or that most people's immune systems will clear the virus, distract you from the fact that for some, the high risk strains of the virus can be deadly.

HPV is the cause of several cancers but primarily cancer of the cervix in women and cancer of the oropharynx (mouth and throat) in men. The National Cancer Institute reports that 11,000 women every year get cervical cancer – only 30% of them were screened (pap smears) on time. This reinforces the need for adolescent vaccination and screening pap smears for women beginning at age 21.

Every year, 21,000 men and women get HPV-related cancers for which there are no screening tests. Without screening to catch it early, it is imperative that we approach this with prevention through vaccination.

Hepatitis B is another virus that is linked to cancer. Hepatitis B vaccination includes a series of three shots that are recommended starting at birth through age 18 years. Vaccination should also be considered for adults who are at increased risk for Hepatitis B infection.

Vaccines and screenings can be expensive. Most health insurance covers vaccines and preventive care. If yours does not, or you have a high deductible, we can help you access lower cost care. If your family does not have insurance, your insurance never covers vaccines, or you have Medicaid, your children 0-18 years old qualify for vaccines through the Vaccine for Children Program offered at some area public and private clinics. South Heartland's Hastings/Adams County Immunization Clinic is held the first Thursday of each month from 12:00 pm-6:00 pm. Please call 402-462-6211 or 1-877-238-7595 for an appointment or to find an immunization clinic near you. Our clinic also offers adult Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) vaccine for eligible adults.

Vaccines can protect, screenings can detect, and lives can be saved!

For more information on HPV or vaccination visit www.southheartlandhealth.org, <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/>, <http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Immunization/Pages/Home.aspx>, <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/child-adolescent.html> for the childhood vaccination schedule and <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/adult.html> for the adult schedule.

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