

Vaccination = Protection for All Ages

Are you and your family members up to date on your immunizations? August is National Immunization Awareness Month – a good time to learn about the impact of vaccination, the school requirements for Nebraska students and the recommendations for vaccinations for all ages.

Vaccines are 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 show up in our communities. This reinforces our ongoing commitment to make sure that all are protected. Vaccination is the key to protection.

Are your children ready to start a new school year? Make sure to review shot records and get each member updated with all the recommended vaccinations. Can't locate your shot records? Call your doctor's office for a printout or visit the Nebraska State Immunization Information System (NESIIS) http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/nesiis_index.aspx.

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

Nebraska law requires that school age children meet the minimum immunization standards for attending both public and private schools. 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.

Families must provide proof of immunization to schools prior to students attending classes. Schools are required to keep current immunization records on students and submit them to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Immunization Program each year.

We strive for high rates of vaccination because it is important for preventing the spread of disease. In the South Heartland District of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties, kindergarten vaccination rates are above 93% for all of the required immunizations. In Nebraska, the overall rates are above 95% for kindergarten students. The national target is a vaccination rate at or above 95% for this age group.

Childhood diseases are not the only diseases that can be prevented with vaccines. Another important vaccine that is available today protects against certain cancers. It is the HPV vaccine. HPV vaccine protects against the types of human papillomavirus (HPV) that are most closely linked with cancer. This vaccine is recommended for boys and girls at age 11-12 when the immune response is strongest and before potential exposure to the virus.

Young adults are at the highest risk for HPV infection. Beginning in their teen years, males and females who engage in intimate skin-to-skin contact can be exposed to HPV. Since the virus can live on pubic and genital areas, even external skin-to-skin intimate contact can transmit the virus.

Women age 13-26 and men age 13-21 should receive HPV vaccination. The age of the first dose of this vaccine determines if 2 or 3 doses is needed. It is important that all recommended shots in the HPV series be given to protect from infection.

HPV is a very common virus. For most people, the body's immune system will clear the virus but for others, infection with high risk strains of the virus can be deadly. HPV vaccination can protect from cancers of the cervix, penis, anus and oropharynx (throat and tonsils).

Don't let the cost of vaccine keep you or your family members from getting vaccinated. Most health insurance covers vaccines and preventive care. If your insurance does not, or you have a high deductible, South Heartland District Health Department can help you access lower cost care.

If your family has Medicaid, does not have insurance, or your insurance never covers vaccines, then your children 0-18 years old qualify for federally-funded vaccines through the Vaccine for Children Program. This program is offered through some clinics in the South Heartland area and also at South Heartland's Hastings/Adams County Immunization Clinic. For adults, age 19-64, Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) vaccine is offered to those that are uninsured or have insurance that never covers the vaccine.

The Immunization clinic is held the first Thursday of each month from 12:00 pm - 6:00 pm. Call 402-462-6211 or 1-877-238-7595 for an appointment or for help locating an immunization clinic near you.

Take time this month to review your own immunization records and those of your family members. Check to make sure that everyone is up-to-date with recommended vaccines and protected from those vaccine-preventable diseases, including cancer, that can lead to disability and death. If needed, make an appointment to get caught up on recommended vaccines.

Vaccination protects you, your family and your community.

For more information on HPV, immunizations, and vaccination schedules contact SHDHD or visit www.southheartlandhealth.org, www.cdc.gov/hpv, dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Immunization/, www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/.

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