Back to School: Don’t forget your vaccinations!

As you are putting important dates on your calendar, scheduling school physicals, buying backpacks, pencils, notebooks, and locker gear, don’t forget to pull out your child’s immunization records to make sure everything is up to date.

August is National Immunization Awareness Month, a time to remind parents, caregivers, healthcare providers and others that immunization improves the health and quality of life for persons of all ages in the United States. Vaccines are a means of mobilizing the body's natural defenses and are considered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to be one of the greatest achievements of biomedical science and public health. Owing to the advent and wide-spread use of vaccines, the levels of illness and death caused by many serious diseases have decreased dramatically in the United States. In order to keep these diseases at bay, it is important to maintain high levels of vaccine coverage.

We all need immunizations (also called vaccines or shots) to help protect us from serious diseases. Shots can prevent infectious diseases like measles, pertussis (whooping cough), and rubella. Sadly, people in the United States still die from these and other vaccine-preventable diseases. To help prevent such tragic and unnecessary events, it is important to know which shots you need and when to get them.

Like many states, Nebraska requires proof of immunizations before a child can continue to attend school. The diseases that the child must be protected against include: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, Haemophilus influenza, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, rubella, pneumococcal, and varicella (chicken pox). Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, all students in grades K-12 are required to have two doses of varicella if they have not had the disease. In addition, teens and adolescents are required to have a Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis) booster prior to entering 7th grade. While not required for school attendance, it is recommended that children receive vaccination against hepatitis A, and adolescents receive vaccinations against meningitis and human papillomavirus.

Keeping up to date on what each person needs can be a little confusing. Everyone over age 6 months of age needs a seasonal flu shot every year. Other shots work best when they are given at certain ages. The following immunization recommendations come from the CDC and the Immunization Action Coalition. These organizations offer recommendations on immunizations for people of all ages, but the following should be considered for your children prior to the beginning of their school year:

1) Babies and Young Children:
   - At Birth: Hepatitis B
   - At 2 and 4 months: Hepatitis B, DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis), PCV (pneumococcal conjugate vaccine), Hib (haemophilus influenzae type B), polio, and Rota (rotovirus)
   - At 6 months: repeat 4 month series, plus Influenza vaccine at 6-59 months
   - 12 months or older: MMR (measles, mumps, rubella), DTaP, PCV, Hib, Varicella (Chicken Pox), Hepatitis A
   - 4-6 years of age: DTaP, Polio, MMR, and Varicella

2) Children from 7-18 years old:
   - Human Papillomavirus (HPV) – Check with your child’s physician about taking a series of 3 HPV shots, preferably at age 11-12 years, but up through age 26, to prevent cervical cancer.
   - Influenza – The components in this seasonal vaccine change yearly, so it is important to get protection annually.
   - Meningococcal disease – This vaccine is recommended for children at 11-12 years old. The CDC has recently recommended a booster for children at 16-18 years. This is particularly important for students who are college-bound and planning to live in a dormitory and for people with certain medical conditions.
Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) (Tdap, Td) – Booster dose of Tdap at age 11-12. Older children who have already had a Td booster should get a Tdap shot for extra protection for pertussis. After that, a Td booster dose is recommended every ten years.

These immunizations may be obtained from your physician’s office. If you meet eligibility requirements, another option is the Vaccine for Children (VFC) program. This program is available to children from birth through 18 years of age throughout the South Heartland District of Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties, and provides recommended vaccines usually for the cost of a donation. Eligibility requires meeting one of the following conditions: 1) Eligible for Medicaid, 2) without health insurance, 3) American Indian or Alaska Native, or 4) Health insurance that does not pay for routine immunizations.

For more information on vaccines – including recommendations for adults – please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at the following website: [http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines).

If you have questions after reviewing these recommendations, we encourage you to contact your healthcare provider or South Heartland District Health Department. In addition, make sure you have your own copy of your immunization record so that you have it for reference and in case of emergencies.

Stay up-to-date on your vaccinations so that you and the people you encounter can be healthier!

_Anita Sullivan, R.N., is the Health Surveillance Coordinator and VFC Clinic Coordinator with South Heartland District Health Department. She may be reached toll free at 1-877-238-7595._