



MEDIA RELEASE

STATE OF TENNESSEE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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IMMUNIZE TO PROTECT YOUR INFANT FROM PREVENTABLE ILLNESS

National Infant Immunization Week is April 24-May 1

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Every year, many thousands of young children become ill from diseases that could have been prevented by routine childhood immunizations. These children miss time from day care and school, thousands are hospitalized and some even die. The Tennessee Department of Health is observing National Infant Immunization Week this April by educating parents about the benefits of timely vaccination and sharing information on a new and more effective vaccine now available for young children.

“Immunizations are a vital part of preventive health care and provide a simple means of protecting children from infections that can be life threatening, particularly for very young children,” said Health Commissioner Susan R. Cooper, MSN, RN. “We urge all parents to talk with their child’s health provider about getting all the recommended vaccines needed to help keep their children healthy.”

Tennessee ranks highly among states for its immunization of young children. Outstanding progress has been made in immunization rates for children younger than 2 years old. Immunization coverage rates in the United States for vaccines routinely recommended for infants and young children remain at or near record highs.

Despite this progress, much work remains to improve immunization rates and protect the health of children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports more than one million children in the United States are not adequately immunized and in jeopardy from vaccine-preventable diseases. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of dollars are being spent on the care of disease stricken children whose illnesses could have been avoided.

Tennessee has recently adopted new childhood immunization requirements to better protect children from serious diseases, especially those that can spread easily in a school or pre-school setting. The new 2010 requirements apply to those who attend child care, pre-school and school. A complete list of the new immunization requirements as well as information for parents is available on the department Web site at <http://health.state.tn.us/CEDS/required.htm>. One important change that affects infants is that children enrolling in child care must now show documentation of hepatitis A, hepatitis B and pneumococcal vaccination.

Medical advances continue to enable health care providers to prevent illnesses that they previously could not. An improved pneumococcal conjugate vaccine has just become available and is recommended for all children under the age of 5, as they are most at risk for

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serious diseases caused by pneumococcal bacteria. This new pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, or PCV13, protects children against six additional strains of the bacteria not covered by the previous seven-strain version, PCV7, including a strain that has become resistant to antibiotics and can be hard to treat.

“Parents of children who have received one or more doses of PCV7 should complete their child’s immunization series with PCV13,” said Kelly Moore, MD, medical director of the state immunization program. “In addition, all children younger than age 5 who have received all of their PCV7 doses should receive one dose of PCV13 for the added protective benefits.”

Vaccines required by the state to attend school and child care facilities are already among those routinely recommended for all children by the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics, so most young children have already received them. Parents should talk with their child's health care provider to be sure they have had everything they need.

Children and teens younger than age 19 who have TennCare as well as those who do not have health insurance can receive free vaccines through the federal Vaccines for Children Program in participating private medical offices and county health departments. Parents should ask their child's health care provider if they participate in VFC. If a child has insurance that does not pay for vaccines or if parents are unable to afford them, local health departments can provide the immunizations. Health departments and VFC providers give vaccines for a small fee that can be adjusted based on the parent’s income.

For general information about vaccines, visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines. For more information on the new requirements, call your county health department or go to the Web at <http://health.state.tn.us/CEDS/required.htm>.

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