

Daily Union

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Why Immunize?

Whether you are sending your infant to child care for the very first time or returning your school-aged children back to the classroom, now is a good time to make sure your child is up-to-date with their age-appropriate immunizations. The Vaccines.gov website sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers the following answers to the question "Why Immunize?":

Immunizations can save your child's life. Because of advances in medical science, your child can be protected against more diseases than ever before. Some diseases that once injured or killed thousands of children, have been eliminated completely and others are close to extinction— primarily due to safe and effective vaccines. Polio is one example of the great impact that vaccines had have in the United States. Polio was once America's most-feared disease, causing death and paralysis across the country, but today, thanks to vaccination, there are no reports of polio in the United States.

Vaccination is very safe and effective. Vaccines are only given to children after a long and careful review by scientists, doctors, and healthcare professionals. Vaccines will involve some discomfort and may cause pain, redness, or tenderness at the site of injection but this is minimal compared to the pain, discomfort, and trauma of the diseases these vaccines prevent. Serious side effects following vaccination, such as severe allergic reaction, are very rare. The disease-prevention benefits of getting vaccines are much greater than the possible side effects for almost all children.

Immunization protects others you care about. Children in the U.S. still get vaccine-preventable diseases. In fact, we have seen resurgences of measles and whooping cough (pertussis) over the past few years. Since 2010, there have been between 10,000 and 50,000 cases of whooping cough each year in the United States and about 10 to 20 babies, many of which were too young to be fully vaccinated, died each year. While some babies are too young to be protected by vaccination, others may not be able to receive certain vaccinations due to severe allergies, weakened immune systems from conditions like leukemia, or other reasons. To help keep them safe, it is important that you and your children who are able to get vaccinated are fully immunized. This not only protects your family, but also helps prevent the spread of these diseases to your friends and loved ones.

Immunizations can save your family time and money. A child with a vaccine-preventable disease can be denied attendance at schools or child care facilities. Some vaccine-preventable diseases can result in prolonged disabilities and can take a financial

toll because of lost time at work, medical bills or long-term disability care. In contrast, getting vaccinated against these diseases is a good investment and is usually covered by insurance. The Vaccines for Children program is a federally funded program that provides vaccines at no cost to children from low-income families. To find out more about the VFC program, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/> or ask your child's health care professional.

Immunization protects future generations. Vaccines have reduced and, in some cases, eliminated many diseases that killed or severely disabled people just a few generations ago. For example, smallpox vaccination eradicated that disease worldwide. Your children don't have to get smallpox shots anymore because the disease no longer exists. By vaccinating children against rubella (German measles), the risk that pregnant women will pass this virus on to their fetus or newborn has been dramatically decreased, and birth defects associated with that virus no longer are seen in the United States. If we continue vaccinating now, and vaccinating completely, parents in the future may be able to trust that some diseases of today will no longer be around to harm their children in the future. *Source: www.vaccines.gov*

On a related note, at a recent coalition meeting here in Geary County, I heard from several area health agencies that flu vaccines are becoming available. Having had a near death experience with Influenza A in 2012, I can't stress enough the importance of getting this annual vaccine. Each flu season brings its own unique challenges and influenza effects people in different ways. Those with compromised immune systems and the young are especially vulnerable, but even healthy people (like I was) can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. Even healthy people can get very sick from the flu and spread it to others. From 1975 thru 2007 the average annual deaths related to influenza ranges from 3,000 to 49,000 people in the United States alone. The senior citizen population is also a vulnerable population. According to the CDC "during recent flu seasons, between 80% and 90% of flu related deaths have occurred in people 65 years and older." The "flu" season in the U.S. can begin as early as October and last until May. Getting vaccinated before the season begins is the best way to reduce the chances that you will get the flu. The CDC recommends that all persons age 6 months or older receive the flu vaccine annually.

There are several locations in Junction City where you can get immunizations. In addition to the Geary County Health Department, children can get immunized at Dillon's Pharmacy, Wal-Mart Pharmacy, and CVS Pharmacy. Health insurance policies typically cover a portion of, if not the entire, cost for immunizations. Check with the agency in advance to make sure you know they have the vaccines you need, determine if there is adequate insurance coverage, and schedule a time to get immunized.

For more information on health and wellness, contact me at the Geary County Extension office at 785-238-4161. Unit next time, keep living resourcefully!