



NEWS RELEASE

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Parents Reminded to Keep Their Infants Up to Date on Vaccinations During National Infant Immunization Week

BISMARCK, N.D. – During National Infant Immunization Week, April 26 to May 3, 2014, the North Dakota Department of Health reminds parents of the importance of protecting infants from vaccine-preventable diseases.

2014 marks the 20th anniversary of National Infant Immunization Week, an annual observance that emphasizes the need to fully immunize children 24 months and younger against 14 vaccine-preventable diseases. Following the recommended immunization schedule not only protects the infant, but also everyone in their community, by preventing and reducing the spread of infectious diseases.

“Because of the success of vaccines in preventing disease, parents may not have heard of some of today’s vaccines or the serious diseases they prevent,” said immunization program manager, Molly Howell. “These diseases can be especially serious for infants and young children. That is why it is important to follow the recommended immunization schedule to protect infants and children by providing immunity early in life, before they are exposed to potentially life-threatening diseases.”

Vaccine-preventable diseases still circulate in North Dakota, the United States, and around the world, so continued vaccination is necessary to protect everyone from potential outbreaks. One example of the seriousness of vaccine-preventable diseases is an increase in measles cases and outbreaks that have occurred in the United States in 2013 and 2014. More than 100 cases have been reported in the United States so far this year; the vast majority of measles cases have occurred in unvaccinated individuals. Measles kills 1 in 1,000 cases, so an increase in the number of cases occurring in the United States is concerning. While North Dakota has not seen a measles case since 2011, in 2013, a case of meningitis caused by *Haemophilus influenzae* type B, a vaccine-preventable disease, was diagnosed; it was only the second case of its type in the state

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since 1991.

“2014 also marks the 20th anniversary of the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program. The VFC Program helps provide vaccines to children whose parents or guardians may not be able to afford them, and helps many more children receive their vaccines according to the recommended immunization schedule. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, from 1994 to 2013, it is estimated that childhood immunization has prevented 322 million illnesses, 21 million hospitalizations, and 732,000 premature deaths due to vaccine preventable diseases. Routine childhood immunization has saved an estimated \$295 billion in direct and \$1.38 trillion in societal costs. More than 200 healthcare providers in North Dakota are enrolled in the VFC Program, so cost should never be a barrier to immunization,” said Howell. “Private health insurance also covers the cost of immunizations.”

Parents should contact their primary care physician or local public health unit for vaccinations for their children.

For more information about National Infant Immunization Week, contact Molly Howell, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or at 1.800.472.2180, or visit our website at www.ndhealth.gov/immunize.

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