Opportunities to Educate Parents on the Importance of Vaccination

In the past decade the number of required vaccinations for young children has greatly increased. Currently infants receive 14 different vaccines, sometimes requiring up to 5 shots per visit, and by the age of 2, the typical American child will have received 26 inoculations.¹ While it varies by state, children are required to have between 30 and 45 different vaccinations before entering public school. This rise in recommended vaccinations, coupled with strong media attention on advocates touting alleged negative vaccine side effects, has led some parents to ask their pediatricians to space out vaccinations or forgo them altogether. In fact, a recent study² found that seventy-seven percent of parents indicated they had concerns about the safety and or usefulness of vaccines for their children. Another survey reported that 89% of responding physicians experienced at least one vaccine refusal per month.³ Concerns about vaccine safety were one of the most common reasons why parents of children with asthma did not vaccinate their children against the flu, and these parents were also less likely to know that the flu is a trigger for asthma.⁴

The increase in the number of children who are not getting vaccinated has caused outbreaks in vaccine preventable diseases such as the 2008 measles epidemic and 2010 whooping cough (pertussis) epidemic in California. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported⁵ on May 24, 2011 that while typically there are just 56 measles cases annually, the cases of measles in the United States have already hit a 15-year high at 188 cases. The costs of treating these diseases can often be far more costly than the prophylactic vaccines. It is therefore crucial that health plans and other health organizations promote the fact that the benefits of vaccinations far outweigh the risks. National organizations, as well as federal and state governments, offer valuable information and resources on vaccination schedules and recommendations.

What is your health plan or organization doing to help ensure that people are being vaccinated? Tell us about it!

Resources for Vaccine Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information about vaccines for parents, providers, employers and individuals on its website, which is frequently updated to reflect the most recent vaccine schedules, safety information and recommendations.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has also created a website dedicated to immunization issues for preteens and teens. The protection that some childhood vaccines provide can begin wear off as children grow older. Older children and adolescents can also develop risks for other diseases. This new website contains multimedia resources and information for teens, their parents and health professionals. There is a link on the site to an adolescent immunization scheduler that can be downloaded to a personal computer to determine the vaccines needed

The National Vaccine Program Office

Many federal agencies are involved in promoting vaccinations, and the National Vaccine Program Office (NVPO) is responsible for providing leadership and coordinating activities among these various agencies. NVPO recently released the U.S National Vaccine Plan, which consists of a strategic plan and an implementation plan with measurable outcomes to be achieved over a 10 year time period. The National Vaccine Plan provides guidance to key stakeholders, including health plans, to aid in implementation and prevent infectious disease in the United States.

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved a new type of vaccine called Fluzone Intradermal to aid in the prevention of the flu. This new vaccine has a needle that is 90% shorter than typical vaccine needles and works by eliciting an immune response from dendritic cells in the skin. The virus in Fluzone Intradermal is an inactivated influenza virus. Fluzone Intradermal is approved for use in adults 18 through 64 years of age.

It is important to encourage adults who come into contact with children to get vaccinated for the flu to decrease the likelihood of spreading the illness. This newly approved vaccine type may increase the number of adults who are willing to get vaccinated due to the ease of administration.

American College Of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)

ACOG has recently created a website that is devoted to providing up-to-date information for obstetricians, gynecologists and patients about vaccinations for adolescent and adult women, including those who are breastfeeding and pregnant. This website, [http://www.immunizationforwomen.org](http://www.immunizationforwomen.org), includes information about vaccine safety, vaccine schedules and practice management guidelines.

The American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology released a study that found that infants younger than six months of age who were born to mothers who were vaccinated during pregnancy were less likely to be hospitalized. These findings are consistent with previous studies and suggest that health benefits from vaccination during pregnancy should be a priority research area.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) supports the vaccination of all children to help stop the spread of infectious disease and to help protect those individuals who are unable to be vaccinated. The AAP Guidelines updated their childhood vaccination recommendations in February 2011. These guidelines reflect the most up to date information available on when children should receive certain vaccinations. Visit [http://www.aap.org/immunization/](http://www.aap.org/immunization/) for more information.
The AAP, along with the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, recently distributed a letter supporting the CDC’s position that health care professionals not only immunize children against whooping cough (pertussis), but that they also vaccinate themselves and caregivers of children. They urge that all people who come into contact with newborns or very young children get vaccinated due to recent outbreaks of pertussis and the vulnerability of children under 12 months of age.

If your health plan has implemented an innovative vaccination education program or effort please consider submitting your effort to NIHCM’s Promising Practices in Maternal and Child Health program.