



An Important Message to Parents About Adolescent Immunizations

When you're a parent or caregiver for an adolescent, you're like an umbrella. Not only do you have to be ready to offer protection at any given moment, but you never know what's going to be raining down. It's often up to you to be that layer protecting your adolescent from the elements, whether it's making sure they buckle their seatbelts when driving or riding in a car or insisting on broccoli before dessert. Today, let me remind you that **you can shield your adolescent** from something you may take for granted—vaccine-preventable diseases.

While the occurrence of most vaccine preventable diseases is declining; we have seen resurgence of whooping cough (also called pertussis) over the past few years. To prevent whooping cough, **an adolescent or young adult needs a booster of a vaccine called Tdap after age 11 years**. Adolescents also need to be protected from **meningitis** (a vaccine-preventable disease that can lead to loss of limbs and other complications); and females are recommended to receive the **HPV vaccine** series to protect them from Human Papillomavirus a leading cause of cervical cancer. All adolescents should also receive an **annual flu vaccine**. Finally, you should check with your adolescent's health care provider to see if other immunizations may also be needed to catch-up with immunizations that may have been missed during childhood.

It can be hard to get your adolescents to the doctor or clinic for their immunizations, but vaccines, like Tdap, Meningococcal, HPV and influenza are critical to protect them against serious and sometimes deadly diseases. You can sometimes use a "sick visit" to catch up on immunizations; ask your doctor or nurse.

June is West Virginia Adolescent Immunization Month. All around the state, doctors, nurses, clinics, schools and parents will be working together to get adolescents the immunizations they need to protect their health. Our goal is that every adolescent will be fully immunized by the time they reach middle school and annually for influenza. Don't wait until an outbreak occurs or vaccinations are required for college—you would be shocked to know how vulnerable your adolescent is without the recommended immunizations. Other students, relatives, or even a summer spent at camp can expose your adolescent to disease.

Just as an umbrella can collapse in the wind, protection from vaccine-preventable diseases can break down if vaccinations are missed. The sad fact is that low immunization rates can lead to outbreaks—clusters of disease—that can hospitalize or even kill adolescents who are not up-to-date on their immunizations.

We have seen a great reduction in many vaccine-preventable diseases, and we want to continue that trend in West Virginia. Help your child transition into adolescence in a healthy way by staying up-to-date on adolescent vaccines. We urge you to continue to be your adolescent's umbrella, shielding and protecting them.

Your School Health Staff

