



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING

NICK LYON
DIRECTOR

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CONTACT: Jennifer Smith
(517) 241-2112

August is National Immunization Awareness Month
Parents encouraged to make back-to-school appointments, keep children's vaccines current

LANSING, Mich. – This National Immunization Awareness Month, Michigan parents are encouraged to get a head start on back-to-school planning by talking with a pediatrician today about recommended vaccines. Before beginning school in the fall, children entering a licensed childcare facility, kindergarten, 7th grade, or moving to a new school district, need to be up to date on their immunizations or obtain a waiver from their local health department.

“Now is the perfect time to talk with your family physician about the vaccinations your children need before the school year,” said Dr. Eden Wells, chief medical executive for the MDHHS. “Immunizations are safe and effective, and by keeping current on the recommended vaccination schedule, parents can protect their children and our communities against vaccine-preventable diseases.”

Every year there are cases of vaccine-preventable diseases in Michigan. Nationally, there has been a recent increase in cases of measles, and the only way to reverse the trend is to build and maintain high vaccination rates in our communities. Currently, Michigan’s statewide waiver rate for children and adolescents is 5 percent, but rates vary by county. To address this, MDHHS is partnering with local health departments to educate parents on the benefits of vaccines and the risks associated with not vaccinating – risks to both to the individual and the community.

As part of these efforts, beginning January 2015, a new administrative rule went into effect requiring parents to talk with a health educator at their local health department before opting their children out of vaccinations. The new rule ensures parents and guardians seeking a non-medical waiver have the opportunity to discuss their concerns and questions regarding immunizations prior to the waiver being signed.

Parents are encouraged to make an appointment with their family physician or local health department as early as possible. Further, cost should not be a barrier to vaccinations. The Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program helps provide vaccines to children whose parents or guardians may not be able to afford them – parents are encouraged to contact their local health department for additional information. Parents who choose not to vaccinate must make an appointment with their local health department to receive a non-medical waiver, it is no longer available at schools or childcare.

For more information about vaccinations including immunization schedules, local health department locations, and resources regarding low-cost vaccination options for the uninsured or underinsured, visit www.michigan.gov/immunize. To check a listing of county and school immunizations rates, visit http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/0,4612,7-132-2942_4911_4914_68361---,00.html.

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