



Kiowa County Health Department

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Skipping Vaccinations Places Too Many Oklahoma Children At Risk

When was the last time you saw a child who was ill with measles, mumps, chickenpox, or whooping cough? Truth is, while occasional outbreaks are still reported, these diseases have largely disappeared thanks to childhood vaccinations to prevent them. In fact, two to three million deaths worldwide are prevented by vaccinations.

The disappearance of many childhood diseases has led some parents to question whether vaccines are still necessary and if they are safe. Some parents choose to delay vaccines or withhold them altogether from their children. This inaction places not just their own children but other children at risk of getting serious diseases, even while scientific evidence overwhelmingly shows these vaccines are safe.

“When we don’t see children dying from measles or hospitalized due to Hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b) it is difficult to realize how important vaccinations are for the health of our children,” said Lori Linstead, director of the Immunization Service, Oklahoma State Department of Health. “Vaccines prevent diseases that not only kill children, but can also lead to lifelong disabilities. For example, before vaccines, parents in the United States could expect that every year Hib would cause meningitis in 15,000 children, leaving many with permanent brain damage.”

Oklahoma currently ranks 48th in the nation for the percent of children up-to-date with their primary vaccines. Only 61 percent of babies and toddlers 19 through 35 months of age in Oklahoma have completed their vaccines. “Vaccinating children on time is essential to preventing the return of vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, whooping cough, and diphtheria,” said Linstead.

Linstead said vaccines are available for all children, even those without health insurance, through the federal Vaccines for Children program, or through private health insurance. All county health departments and many private doctors in Oklahoma participate in the Vaccines for Children program.

For more information about childhood vaccinations, contact the Kiowa County Health Department at 580-726-3316 or visit the agency’s new website at <http://kiowa.health.ok.gov> .