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Comanche County Health Department: Now is the Time to Vaccinate for School and Child Care

Getting all of the recommended vaccines is one of the most important things a parent can do to protect their child's health, especially when they are in a setting such as a school or a child care center where disease outbreaks can occur. Whether it's a baby starting at a new child care facility, a toddler heading to preschool, a student going back to elementary, middle or high school – or even a college freshman – parents should check their child's vaccine records.

“When parents are preparing to send their child to child care, school or college, it's the perfect time to ensure he or she is up to date on all recommended and required vaccines,” said Brandie O'Connor, Comanche County Health Department Regional Director.

Child care facilities, schools and colleges are highly susceptible to outbreaks of infectious diseases. Children can easily transmit illnesses to one another due to poor hand washing, uncovered coughs, and close contact with many people. When children aren't vaccinated, they are at increased risk for disease and can spread disease to others in their classrooms and communities. This includes infants too young to be fully vaccinated and people with weakened immune systems due to cancer or other health conditions.

The Comanche County Health Department offers all required vaccines for school children and teens 18 years of age and younger. Parents of children with private health insurance or SoonerCare health insurance are encouraged to take their children to their regular health care provider or clinic to receive these vaccines.

Children attending child care facilities in Oklahoma must be up-to-date for their age with childhood vaccines. A schedule showing the required vaccines is available on the Oklahoma State Department of Health web site at:

http://www.ok.gov/health/Disease_Prevention_Preparedness/Immunizations/Vaccines_for_Child_Care/index.html

Kindergarten Students

Children entering kindergarten are due for boosters or second doses of four vaccines:

- MMR (measles, mumps and rubella vaccine)
- Polio
- DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccines)
- Chickenpox

The second dose of chickenpox vaccine is recommended, but not required by Oklahoma's school law.

Children who recently moved to Oklahoma may also need hepatitis A vaccination, which is required for students in all grades in Oklahoma. Students need at least one dose of hepatitis A vaccine to start school. A second dose is due six to 18 months later.

Grades 7-10

Students in grades seven through ten are required to have one dose of Tdap vaccine, which protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough). Older students are strongly encouraged to receive a dose of Tdap vaccine if they missed it. This is necessary for adolescents and adults so they won't contract whooping cough and infect babies and toddlers.

Parents and teens, both boys and girls, are strongly urged to ask their health care provider for HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine, which prevents several types of cancer, and also the meningococcal vaccine (MCV4). The immune response to this vaccine is better in pre-teens and can mean better protection for teens.

The MCV4 protects against the devastating effects of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. Meningococcal disease can cause death in less than 48 hours and leave those who survive with life-long problems such as brain damage or limb amputation. Even with the best treatment, one in ten people who get meningococcal disease will die from it.

HPV and MCV4 are recommended for all teens at 11-12 years of age with a booster of MCV4 at age 16. The meningococcal vaccine is required for first-time college students who will live in on-campus student housing. College students are also required to have MMR and hepatitis B vaccines.

For more information about immunizations, call the Comanche County Health Department at (580) 248-5890 or contact your health care provider.