

Vaccination protects the child and the community

IMMUNIZATION

By Darcell Brown

For Digital First Media

There was a time when viral and bacterial infections killed thousands of American children every year. Now we have immunizations to fortify an individual's immune system to protect us from many deadly illnesses.

“Not only do vaccines protect the child who is vaccinated against more than a dozen diseases, they can also protect others in the community, like a neighbor who has cancer, or a newborn too young to be fully vaccinated,” says Shane Bies, administrator of Public Health Nursing Services with the Oakland County Health Division. Since 1978, Michigan law has required children to be up to date on immunizations on or before the first day of school or child care. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend immunization against measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), polio, hepatitis A and B, rotavirus, diphtheria/ tetanus/acellular pertussis, hemophilus influenza, varicella (chicken pox) and pneumococcus.

“Serious diseases such as whooping cough (pertussis) are still out there in our community and still others, like measles, are only an airplane trip away,” Bies says.

Measles, mumps and rubella are caused by viruses. MMR vaccines can prevent these highly contagious infectious diseases, which spread from person to person through the air. Anyone without immunity to them could contract these diseases just by being around someone who has them.

“For example, measles killed 115,000 children worldwide in 2014, and left many more mentally disabled. Vaccine-preventable diseases are still an issue in the United States and more so in other parts of the world. They are constantly being imported in the U.S. by travelers, so children are at constant risk of exposure,” says Charles J. Barone, M.D., chair of the Department of Pediatrics at Henry Ford Hospital and Clinical Associate Professor of Pediatrics at Wayne State University School of Medicine.

Influenza, whooping cough and meningitis— all preventable — killed both adults and children in our area last year.

No child should go without vaccines because of cost. Many insurance policies cover immunization, but if there is a gap in coverage a CDC program called Vaccines for Children provides vaccines at no cost. Visit cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/index.html for more information.

Many private providers offer free vaccines, as do the Macomb County Health Department (health.macombgov.org) and Oakland County Health Division (oakgov.com/health).

Macomb County Immunization Clinics are at the Central Health Center, 43525 Elizabeth Road, Mount Clemens, 586-4695235; Southeast Health Center, 5401 Harper, St. Clair Shores, 586-466-6800; and Southwest Health Center, 27690 Van Dyke, Warren, 586-465-8537.

Oakland County provides immunizations at the North Oakland Health Center, 1200 N Telegraph, Bldg. 34 East, Pontiac, 248-8581280; and at South Oakland Health Center, 27725 Greenfield Road, Southfield,

248-424-7000. Bies encourages parents to talk to their child's health-care provider or call the nurse on call at 800-848-5533 for more information.

Darcell Brown is a freelance writer with a master's degree in public health from the University of Illinois at Chicago.



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