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Include immunizations on back-to-school checklist

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- Summer sure does fly by; so much fun to be had and so little time.

The lazy days of summer really do go by in the blink of an eye. But on the bright side, there are several weeks of summer left for most families to enjoy, so take that camping trip, spend the day at the beach or go for a long bike ride. Just don't forget to make sure your kids are up-to-date on their immunizations before the bell rings on the first day of school.

All children need protection from vaccine-preventable diseases, like tetanus, pertussis, diphtheria, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis B, meningitis, chickenpox, and COVID-19. Protection is especially important for those entering a childcare facility, kindergarten or 7th grade, and for those changing school districts, as certain vaccinations are mandatory.

If your child is college-bound, make sure they are up-to-date on their immunizations as well, including meningococcal vaccines. Some diseases can spread quickly in settings like dorm rooms and classrooms, so be aware that many colleges and universities have vaccination requirements for school entry.

It is the health department's responsibility to ensure that the public is protected from vaccine-preventable diseases and that parents make informed decisions about whether to vaccinate their child. If your child is not immunized:

- They are at greater risk of catching vaccine-preventable diseases.
- They can infect others, including infants and the elderly, who are at-risk of suffering a more severe reaction.
- They may be excluded from school or childcare for several days or weeks to prevent catching or spreading a vaccine-preventable disease.

Diseases like pertussis, measles, and chicken pox are making a comeback, due in part to an increase in the number of children who are not being immunized. The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) strongly encourages parents to immunize their children, but ultimately, it's the parent's decision. Parents who do not want their child to be immunized will need to present the school with a signed waiver. If immunization is being waived because of a medical reason, your child's doctor can sign the waiver. If immunization is being waived for religious or personal reasons, the health department will need to sign the waiver. The purpose of

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the waiver is to make sure that parents have an opportunity to speak with a health care professional about vaccinations and discuss any concerns.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department provides immunizations by appointment to those with Medicaid and without insurance. A small fee may apply, but no child is turned away because of an inability to pay. Children 18 years and younger may be eligible for the Vaccines for Children program, which provides vaccines at no cost to kids who might not be vaccinated because of an inability to pay. To qualify, a child must have Medicaid, have no health insurance, be under-insured, or be an American Indian or Alaskan Native. Those with certain private insurance plans may also be able to get vaccinated at the health department; just be sure to call first to see if your insurance is accepted.

For more information, or to make an immunization or waiver appointment, please call MMDHD at 989-224-2195 in Clinton County, 989-875-3681 in Gratiot County, or 989-831-5237 in Montcalm County.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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