

Nevada 49th in child immunization – we can do better

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Today marks the beginning of Nevada Infant Immunization Week, an annual observance to promote the benefits of immunizations and to improve the health of children two years old or younger. While childhood immunization rates for vaccines routinely recommended for children remain at or near record levels, recent outbreaks of whooping cough and measles are reminders that children continue to suffer from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Nationwide, comprehensive immunization coverage among children aged 19 to 35 months is 70.4 percent, a marginal increase over the previous year. Nevada's rate stands at only 60.6 percent, a decrease from the previous year's figure of 65.3 percent and a ranking of 49th among US states.

Immunization is one of the most important steps a parent can take to protect their children's health. Although the number of vaccines a child needs in the first two years of life may seem like a lot, doctors know a great deal about the human immune system, and they know that a healthy baby's immune system can handle getting all vaccines when they are recommended.

"The recommended immunization schedule is designed to offer protection early in life," said Heidi Parker, Executive Director of Immunize Nevada, "when babies are vulnerable and before it's likely they will be exposed to diseases."

Infants receiving recommended immunizations by age 2 are protected from 14 diseases. Staying on track with the immunization schedule ensures that children have the best protection against diseases like whooping cough and measles by age two.

Unvaccinated, children are left unprotected against diseases that still circulate in this country. For example, more than 48,000 cases of whooping cough were reported in the US in 2012. During this time, 20 deaths have been reported—the majority of these deaths were in children younger than 3 months of age.

Likewise, the US experienced a record number of measles cases during 2014, with 668 cases from 27 states reported to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – the greatest number of cases since measles was presumed to have been eliminated in 2000.

Early childhood immunization is a remarkably safe and cost effective means of controlling these and other diseases. Officials at the CDC estimate that childhood immunizations save an estimated \$10 billion in direct medical costs each year and, over the past 50 years, vaccinations have led to a 95 percent decrease in vaccine-preventable diseases.

While some babies are too young to be protected by vaccination, others may not be able to receive certain vaccinations due to severe allergies, weakened immune systems from conditions like leukemia, or other reasons. To help keep them safe, it is important that all of us who are able to get vaccinated are fully immunized.

If we continue vaccinating now, and vaccinating completely, parents in the future may be able to trust that some diseases of today will no longer be around to harm their children in the future.

For additional information about vaccines or your child's recommended immunization schedule, talk with your child's healthcare provider or visit www.immunizenevada.org/kids.

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