

The Benefits of Immunization

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Vaccines are one of history's most successful and cost-effective public health tools for preventing serious disease and death. Diseases that were once commonplace, such as polio, measles, mumps, whooping cough, diphtheria and rubella, are now only distant memories for most Americans. Today, there are few reminders of the suffering, disabilities and premature deaths caused by diseases that are now prevented with vaccines. However, these diseases are not diseases of the past. They have not disappeared. Many of the viruses and bacteria still circulate in the U.S. or are only a plane ride away. That's why it's so important that children, especially infants and young children, receive recommended immunizations on time to keep them healthy.

Children can now be protected from 14 potentially serious vaccine-preventable diseases. If a child is not vaccinated and is exposed to a disease, the child's body may not be strong enough to fight off the disease. Due to the close contact of one child to another in a child care facility, or at a school, it is extremely important that all infants and children are up to date with all recommended vaccinations.

Infants will receive vaccinations at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months and 12-18 months or older. Before kindergarten all children are required to have vaccinations, which can be given at age 4. The vaccines necessary before kindergarten are booster doses of diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis B, and chickenpox. Hepatitis A may also be given to children as young as 12 months old.

Immunity from some childhood vaccines can decrease over time so booster doses of certain vaccines are recommended in the pre-teen years at age 11-12. As children become adolescents they are at greater risk of catching certain diseases, like meningitis and the human papillomavirus. At a child's 11-12 year old check up it is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that children receive the tetanus-diphtheris-acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap), a vaccine to prevent meningococcal disease and the human papillomavirus vaccine for girls.

Getting immunized is a lifelong, life-protecting job. Adults need to talk to their health care provider to determine their level of risk for infection and their need for vaccinations. A tetanus-diphtheria booster is necessary every 10 years. All adults under the age of 65 who haven't received the pertussis-containing vaccine should have the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine – known as Tdap. A yearly influenza (flu) vaccine should be administered. Adults 65 or older or younger with certain medical conditions should also receive the pneumococcal vaccine. Hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines may be necessary for adults with specific risk factors, or those who simply wish to be protected against the disease. The

vaccine to prevent the human papillomavirus may be given to women age 26 or younger. Other vaccines may be necessary to prevent the measles, mumps, rubella, meningococcal disease and chickenpox. There is a vaccine to prevent shingles for individuals 60 and older. Adults traveling to other countries may also need specific vaccines for international travel, such as yellow fever vaccine or typhoid vaccine.

The Springfield Greene County Health Department's Westside Public Health Center, located at 660 S Scenic Avenue, offers vaccines from birth through adulthood. All of the vaccines necessary to attend a child care facility or school are provided at no cost. Vaccines for adults, including international travel vaccinations, can also be provided, but a fee may apply. Yellow fever and oral or injectable typhoid vaccines are also provided at the Westside Public Health Center.

Appointments are available Monday through Friday. A walk-in clinic is held every Tuesday from 7:30 am to 10:00 am. In addition, through the month of August, a back-to-school shot walk in clinic will be held every Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 10:00 am. For more information, contact the Westside Public Health Center at (417) 874-1220.