



April 25, 2011

## Vaccine-Preventable Diseases Still Cause Illness

*National Infant Immunization Week – April 23-30, 2011*

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.** – Each year, thousands of children become ill from diseases that could have been prevented by basic childhood immunizations. Countless more miss time from day care and school because they are under-immunized or inappropriately immunized. To help prevent illness, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is recognizing National Infant Immunization Week, an annual observance designed to serve as a call to action for parents, caregivers and health care providers to ensure that infants are fully immunized against 14 vaccine-preventable diseases.

“Because of the success of vaccines in preventing disease, many parents don’t know their children are at risk of serious and life-threatening diseases,” Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Damon T. Arnold said. “Immunization is one of the best ways parents can protect their children against serious diseases. I encourage parents to talk with their child’s doctor to ensure their child is up-to-date on immunizations.”

Vaccine-preventable diseases still circulate so continued vaccination is necessary to protect against potential outbreaks. An example of the seriousness of vaccine-preventable diseases is the California whooping cough epidemic last year, resulting in the death of 10 infants, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Some diseases that once injured or killed thousands of children, have been eliminated completely, and others are close to extinction – primarily due to safe and effective vaccines. One example is the elimination of polio in the United States. Polio once caused death and paralysis across the country, but today, thanks to vaccination, there are no reports of polio in the United States. Another example is the smallpox vaccine. Children no longer have to get smallpox shots because the disease no longer exists.

“If we continue vaccinating now, and vaccinating completely, parents in the future may no longer need to worry about some of the diseases we face today,” said Arnold.

Unfortunately, some babies are too young to be completely vaccinated and some people

may not be able to receive certain vaccinations due to severe allergies or weakened immune systems. To help keep them safe, it is important for people who are able to get vaccinated, to be fully immunized.

For parents who may not be able to afford immunizations for their children, the Vaccines for Children program is a federally funded program that provides vaccines at no cost to children from low-income families. For information about this program in Chicago, call 312-746-6050, in all other Illinois areas, call 217-785-1455.

For more information about immunizations, childhood immunization schedules and school immunization requirements, log onto [www.idph.state.il.us/about/shots.htm](http://www.idph.state.il.us/about/shots.htm).

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