

Update immunizations to keep children healthy

This fall, you'll pick out just the right backpack, and fill it with all the back-to-school supplies. But as the new school year arrives, Jacobson Memorial Hospital Care Center (JMHCC) and the N.D. Department of Health (NDDoH) remind parents to also make sure their children are up-to-date on immunizations.

And summer is the time to make those appointments.

North Dakota state law requires students in grades kindergarten through 12 to meet a minimum number of required immunizations before they are allowed to attend school.

The Elgin Community Clinic, Glen Ullin Family Medical Clinic and Richardton Clinic offer childhood immunizations and encourage parents to make an appointment for their children to have any necessary immunizations before school starts.

The clinics offer immunizations as part of their well-child program and are working to make sure every child remains healthy.

“Ensuring children are up-to-date on immunizations is the best way to keep students healthy and stop the spread of infectious diseases such as measles, mumps and pertussis in our schools,” said population health coordinator, TyAwna Ackerman, a registered nurse at JMHCC in Elgin. “Children who are not immunized are not only at risk of becoming ill from a variety of diseases, but are also able to transmit diseases to others, including those who may not be able to be vaccinated due to various medical conditions.”

Before entering school in North Dakota, children must have:

- five doses of DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis)
- four doses of IPV (polio)
- three doses of HBV (hepatitis B)
- two doses of MMR (measles, mumps and rubella)
- two doses of varicella (chickenpox) vaccine

In addition, students entering seventh grade will need:

- one dose of Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis)
- one dose of MCV4 (meningococcal disease)

In addition, students entering the 11th grade will need:

- one additional dose of MCV4 (meningococcal disease)

MenB vaccine

A vaccine, called MenB, which protects against meningococcal disease, has been added to the recommended childhood vaccine schedule that providers follow. It is being recommended for those ages 16-23 to provide protection against strains of meningococcal disease, particularly for college-bound students or others who will be in close living quarters. Two doses are required.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, meningococcal disease is a serious illness caused by bacteria which can lead to meningitis, or an infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord, and infections of the blood. Adolescents and young adults are at increased risk of the disease. Symptoms progress rapidly and are often mistaken for the flu in early stages, but can lead to death within 24 hours in some patients.

This vaccine provides additional protection to vaccinations teens may have received earlier. Both meningococcal and MenB vaccines are recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

HPV vaccine

JMHCC also reminds parents that everyone between the ages of 11 and 26 should receive the human papillomavirus vaccine for the prevention of cervical, throat and other cancers.

“We have an amazing opportunity to prevent certain types of cancer in future generations through HPV vaccinations,” Ackerman said.

The HPV vaccine is recommended by providers for both girls and boys.

JMHCC encourages parents to schedule the first of the two-dose vaccine now, then the second dose can be administered during the student’s sports physical later this summer.

Parents are also encouraged to have their children ages 12 and older to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Cost should not be a barrier to getting children up-to date on immunizations. Children who are uninsured or whose insurance does not cover vaccines can receive vaccine at no cost through the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program. Contact your health care provider or local public health unit if you believe your child could be eligible for VFC vaccines.

If you haven’t done so, check with your health care provider to find out which immunizations your child needs. Once your child is up-to date, be sure to get a copy of his or her immunization record to submit to the school. You can find more information about which vaccines are required for school at www.health.nd.gov/immunize.

Children who are not in compliance, either up-to-date or have a signed exemption form, by Oct. 1 will be excluded from school for not meeting requirements.

Well child visits, sports physicals

The Elgin Community Clinic, Glen Ullin Family Medical Clinic and Richardton Clinic also offer a well-child visit, which is a comprehensive appointment for parents to talk with providers one-on-one about their child. It covers a wide

variety of health concerns, such as growth and development, nutrition, safety, emotional and physical health. The child's height and weight will be measured to determine appropriate growth patterns and milestones that the child should be reaching for their age, as well as discussing appropriate immunizations.

The Elgin Community Clinic (584-3338), Glen Ullin Family Medical Clinic (348-9175) and Richardton Clinic (974-3372) will also be offering discounted sports physicals July 1 through Aug. 31 so athletes can assure they are healthy and ready for practice, and encourage parents to schedule an appointment this summer.