

Protect Your Child Against Illness

Making sure your child's immunizations are up-to-date should be on your back-to-school checklist. And, don't forget your college-bound teenager – they need immunizations as well.

Although U.S. immunization rates have hit an all-time high, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there still are many children who lack proper immunizations. Immunizations are important to protect children from many infectious illnesses, some potentially serious, says Sherman Alter, MD, director of infectious diseases at The Children's Medical Center of Dayton.

Vaccines are proven to drop the incidence of certain illnesses, Dr. Alter says. For example, as the number of people who were vaccinated against polio increased, the number of reported cases dropped. In 1952, there were more than 21,000 cases of polio reported in the United States. In 2000, no cases of polio were reported in the United States.

The newest vaccination recommendations include the chickenpox, or Varicella, vaccine and the influenza (flu) vaccination, Dr. Alter says. Additionally, college students, particularly incoming freshman residing in dormitories, are advised to obtain information about meningitis and receive the meningitis vaccine.

Giving children the chickenpox vaccine will prevent serious complications related to the disease. It also may decrease the chances of getting shingles, a painful adult disease that is a late complication of childhood chickenpox.

Children who receive flu vaccine may be spared the suffering and potentially deadly complications related to the flu. In addition, vaccination of the younger child may prevent the spread of flu to the elderly, such as a grandparent, who may be at risk for a severe influenza infection. The CDC recommends that all children between 6 and 24 months of age receive the flu vaccination.

For more information about vaccinations contact Dr. Alter at alters@childrensdayton.org.

From Growing Together, published by The Children's Medical Center, Dayton, Ohio