

NEWS RELEASE

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DHSS recommends catch-up vaccinations

JEFFERSON CITY, MO – Staying caught up on vaccinations according to schedules recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is always important, but now is the time to get caught up if any doses have been missed. With several vaccine-preventable diseases, such as mumps and measles, currently circulating across the nation, catch-up vaccination is more urgent now. Health care providers can check a patient's shot records to see if any doses have been missed and, if so, get the patient fully vaccinated.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS), in partnership with local public health agencies, is committed to protecting the health of the citizens. While the benefits of vaccines are clear, some individuals may be concerned about side effects or may believe that alternative methods will provide the same protection as vaccines.

"Vaccine schedules are evidence based, and they are effective and safe for the individual and the overall health of the public," said Dr. Randall Williams, DHSS Director. "We highly encourage staying up-to-date on CDC-recommended vaccinations for reducing the potential of infectious diseases. Anyone with concerns should talk to their health care provider about the benefits of vaccines."

Measles has been circulating in several states recently, mostly due to travelers returning with the illness from areas of the world where measles is common and then spreading mostly among unvaccinated individuals. It is one of the most contagious infectious diseases, as 90 percent of individuals without immunity that are exposed will become ill with measles, and it can be serious. By the numbers, one in four cases need to be hospitalized, one out of every 1,000 cases develops brain swelling, and one or two out of 1,000 cases die. The best protection against measles is the MMR vaccine. Getting one dose makes 95 percent of people who receive it immune and a second dose produces immunity in 99 percent. While no confirmed cases of measles have been reported in Missouri in 2019, an outbreak occurred last year in the Kansas City metro area that resulted in 14 cases.

Influenza, or flu, is a respiratory illness caused by a virus and is one of the most commonly reported illnesses in Missouri each year. To bring awareness to the importance of the flu vaccine at the start of this season, Governor Mike Parson was one of several governors across the nation to receive his flu shot publicly to "help all Missourians understand the importance of getting a flu shot in order for our state to be healthy and productive through the entirety of flu season."

The flu season has recently begun to pick up in Missouri—while the current season is not nearly as severe in terms of the number of cases (24,694 versus 103,631), DHSS is still receiving reports of hospitalizations and deaths from flu and flu-like illness. Serious complications, such as pneumonia and inflammation of the heart, brain or muscles, can occur in certain high-risk groups of people. Most people recover without medical care, but these complications can require hospitalization or lead to death. As of Feb. 16, 14 influenza-associated deaths have been reported for the current season. The best defense against influenza is also the flu vaccine. While the effectiveness of the vaccine to prevent illness varies depending on circulating strains each year, it can reduce symptoms and serious outcomes for those who get the shot and get the flu. For current and past weekly influenza reports, visit this website.

In collaboration with several local public health agencies in southeast Missouri, DHSS has been responding to a hepatitis A outbreak since September 2017. Hepatitis A is a highly contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. This outbreak is similar to other large outbreaks in metro areas across the country as the primary risk group is individuals who use illicit drugs. Recently, additional counties have begun to see cases that may be associated with this hepatitis A outbreak or others in neighboring states. The hepatitis A infection can range from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a severe illness lasting several months. Although rare, hepatitis A can cause death in some people. The vaccine is the best way to protect one's self against hepatitis A—95 percent of people who receive it become immune after one dose and 99 percent become immune after two doses. More information about Missouri's outbreak can be found at this website.

About the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services: The department seeks to be the leader in protecting health and keeping people safe. More information about DHSS can be found at health.mo.gov or find us on Facebook and Twitter @HealthyLivingMo.