

Parents Can Make the Difference in Keeping their Children Safe

A recent study conducted by Boulder County Public Health's (BCPH) Immunization Program found that only 60% of children in Boulder County were age-appropriately immunized by 24 months of age. That means 40% of our two-year-olds are vulnerable to diseases like pertussis (whooping cough), measles, mumps, and polio.

The most commonly missed immunization was the fourth dose of DTaP – the combination vaccine that protects against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (whooping cough). “Making sure children receive this vaccination is imperative in our community,” said Heath Harmon, BCPH epidemiologist, “since the rate of pertussis in Boulder County is 13 times that of the U.S. rate.” Most pertussis cases in Boulder County occur in middle and high school children, but infants are the ones most likely to suffer serious complications that require hospitalization. “That’s why it’s especially important for children to get the fourth dose of the DTaP vaccine at 12 months of age,” Harmon said.

When the number of people immunized in a community decreases, disease outbreaks occur. For example, in October 2005, an outbreak of polio occurred in a small community in Minnesota where residents were not immunized, and in the spring of 2006, a mumps epidemic that began in Iowa resulted in 5,000 people from 15 states becoming ill with mumps.

On the flip side, if at least 85% of people in a community are immunized, outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases are rare, because most people are able to fight off the disease. In addition, when 85% of community members are immune, people who cannot be immunized or who are too young to be fully immunized are at decreased risk of contracting a vaccine-preventable illness.

Immunizations that protect against 14 different diseases are available for young children. “Parents can make sure their children are protected against vaccine-preventable diseases by scheduling routine well-child visits with their physicians when the children are 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, and 24 months of age,” explained Pat Hood, coordinator of the BCPH Immunization Program. “At each visit, even if their children are sick, parents should ask their doctors if their children are due for any immunizations,” she said.

If we made even this small effort in our community, it would increase the odds of keeping Boulder County kids safe from vaccine-preventable diseases. For more information about childhood immunizations, please call the Boulder County Public Health Immunization Program at 303-413-7500, or visit our website at www.BoulderCountyShots.org.