What’s on the Horizon for Public Health?

Vaccinate for Life

Vaccines protect us from diseases, so well in fact, that we have forgotten how devastating and painful some diseases can be: measles, mumps, tetanus, pneumococcal and diphtheria to name a few. The chickenpox vaccine even protects us from getting shingles later in life. Most vaccines are given in the first two years of life. Others are given at older ages to boost an original vaccine or to protect against additional diseases. Being up-to-date with shots is a lifetime goal.

Some vaccine-preventable diseases, like chickenpox and pertussis (whooping cough), remain common in the United States. Since 2010, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) sees between 10,000 and 50,000 cases of whooping cough each year in the USA. Unfortunately, most of the deaths each year are in young babies.

Some diseases are no longer common in this country because of vaccination. However, if we stopped vaccinating, the few cases we do have could very quickly become tens or hundreds of thousands of cases. The 2019 measles outbreaks are a key reminder of how quickly diseases can spread when children aren’t vaccinated.

Some diseases are prevented by preteen vaccines, like HPV. The human papillomavirus can lead to serious health problems later in life. Over 34,000 men and women in the United States are diagnosed with cancers caused by HPV each year.

As adults even if you received the vaccines you needed as a child, the protection from some vaccines can wear off. You may also be at risk for other diseases due to your job, lifestyle, travel, or health conditions. Ask your healthcare provider what vaccines you need based on your risk factors.

“As back-to-school planning is underway and certain restrictions are lifted, it is more important than ever to ensure vaccinations are up to date to protect our children and our communities,” said Dr. Keith Stelter, president of the Minnesota Medical Association. Health officials are promoting pediatric vaccinations as well as annual flu shots, because of concerns that a combined surge of COVID-19 and influenza could overwhelm our healthcare system this winter.

In addition to being up-to-date with your vaccinations, Kris Ehresmann, MN Infectious Disease Director, encourages people to consider their individual role in limiting the spread of COVID-19. She asks that people consider their responsibilities before putting themselves in high-risk situations such as crowded bars and events. Ehresmann says, “You can’t always know if someone is infectious or if you yourself are infectious. People can be infectious 48 hours before symptom onset.”

COVID-19 has interrupted every aspect of our lives including making normal vaccination appointments. The Minnesota Department of Health, Horizon Public Health and healthcare providers are concerned about keeping people protected. If you or your children are due for shots, please call your provider for an appointment. If you have questions, call your clinic, MDH at 800-657-3504 or Horizon Public Health at 320-762-6018.

Wear your mask. Wash your hands. Wait six feet back.
Marcia Schroeder RN
Disease Prevention and Control
Horizon Public Health