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Immunizations needed for older kids too

8:22 PM, Aug. 8, 2011 | Comments

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Written by
Dr. Jennifer Mullendore
 Guest Columnist



Immunizations aren't just for babies and young children. Preteens, teenagers, and adults also need immunizations because the protection of some childhood shots wears off over time and different age-groups are at risk of getting different diseases.

In the United States, immunizations have eliminated or dramatically reduced many diseases that once killed thousands of people a year. Because of immunizations, most young people have never seen anyone with measles, mumps or pertussis. But these diseases still exist and outbreaks can occur if enough people aren't immunized.

GET YOUR SHOTS

To learn more and get the immunizations you and your children need, visit your primary care provider or the Buncombe County Department of Health's Immunization Clinic, 35 Woodfin Street, open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday. Visit www.buncombecounty.org for more information.

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Evidence of this has been seen locally with pertussis, also known as whooping cough. Pertussis is a lung infection that spreads easily through the air and causes coughing spells, sometimes followed by vomiting and a high-pitched "whoop" when a breath is taken.

Pertussis usually affects infants and young children, but can also occur in teens and adults. It can be deadly, especially in babies less than 12 months old.

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In 2010, Buncombe County had 68 cases of pertussis, up from 10 cases in 2009. Thankfully, no one died locally, but in California, 10 infants who were too young to be fully immunized against pertussis died during an outbreak last year.

Measles too is on the rebound. Before a vaccine against measles was available, about 450 measles-associated deaths were reported in the U.S. every year. Thanks to

widespread vaccination, measles was virtually eliminated from the U.S. in 2000.

But there have been measles outbreaks recently in Europe, Africa, and Asia (including India), leading to U.S. cases. In 2011, most U.S. measles cases occurred in unvaccinated U.S. residents who had recently traveled to countries where there have been outbreaks. This shows how easily diseases can be transported around the world and emphasizes the importance of vaccination.

The Buncombe County Department of Health recently found that only 51 percent of Buncombe County children ages 24-35 months of age are up-to-date on their shots. The health of our community depends on high rates of vaccination.

Children who cannot be vaccinated because they are too young or have certain medical conditions are at greater risk of serious illness and death from vaccine-preventable diseases than other children, and they depend on the protection provided by the vaccination of others in the community.

If we do not increase vaccination rates in our county, we will continue to see more cases of vaccine-preventable diseases. In addition to the risk of serious illness and death, vaccine-preventable diseases increase costs to our community and to families through doctor's visits, hospitalizations, and time off of work to care for yourself or your sick child.

Dr. Jennifer Mullendore is the Medical Director of the Buncombe County Department of Health and a member of the Western Carolina Medical Society.



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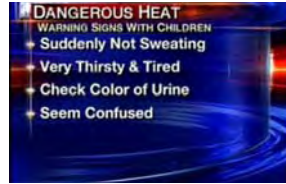
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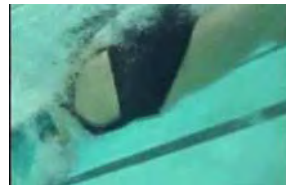
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