

The Importance of Immunizations

Kelley Tillotson, RN
Southeastern District Health Department

What's new with vaccines?

Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) develops written recommendations for the routine administration of vaccines to children and adults in the civilian population; recommendations include age for vaccine administration number of doses and dosing interval, and precautions and contraindications. Over the past year there have been changes with existing vaccine recommendations and a several new vaccines have been made available.

- **Meningococcal (MCV4)**
CDC recommends resuming routine Meningococcal vaccination for all recommended groups according to ACIP recommendations, including children aged 11-12 years and, if not previously vaccinated with Menactra (MCV4), of adolescents at high-school entry (at approximately age 15 years), of college freshmen living in dormitories, and of other persons at increased risk for meningococcal disease. Meningococcal disease is a serious illness, caused by a bacteria. It is a leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children 2 through 18 years old in the United States.
- **Varicella (Chickenpox)**
In 2007, the second dose of Varicella was added to the routine schedule for children 4-6 years of age. Children who have never had chickenpox should get 2 doses of chickenpox vaccine. People 13 years of age and older (who have never had chickenpox or received chickenpox vaccine) should get two doses at least 28 days apart. Children or adolescents who are not fully vaccinated should receive a total of two doses of chickenpox vaccine. Chickenpox is a common childhood disease. It is usually mild, but it can be serious, especially in young infants and adults.
- **Rotavirus**
In February 2006, Rotateq, a live, oral Rotavirus vaccine was licensed. CDC recommends routine vaccination of infants with 3 doses of rotavirus vaccine administered orally at ages 2, 4, and 6 months. The vaccine was developed to protect against acute gastroenteritis in infants and young children. Over 95% of children are infected by the time they are 5 years old, with the most severe cases occurring among infants and young children between 6 months and 24 months of age.
- **Herpes Zoster (Shingles)**
In October 2006, Zostavax was added to the vaccines recommended for adults 60 years and older. A single dose is recommended whether or not they report a prior episode of

herpes zoster. Shingles is a painful localized skin rash often with blisters that is caused by the varicella zoster virus (VZV), the same virus that causes chickenpox. Anyone who has had chickenpox can develop shingles. Shingles most commonly occurs in people 50 years old or older, people who have medical conditions that keep the immune system from working properly, or people who receive immunosuppressive drugs.

- **Human Papillomavirus (HPV)**

The new (HPV) vaccine, Gardasil, is recommended by the ACIP as a 3-dose schedule. Routine vaccination with HPV is recommended for females aged 11 through 12 years; the vaccination series can be started in females as young as age 9 years; and a catch-up vaccination is recommended for females aged 13 through 26 years who have not been vaccinated previously or who have not completed the full vaccine series. It is the first vaccine developed to prevent cervical cancer, precancerous genital lesions, and genital warts due to HPV. The vaccine should be administered before onset of sexual activity (i.e., before women are exposed to the viruses), but females who are sexually active should still be vaccinated.

The above mentioned vaccines are available at all Southeastern District Health Department counties, except for the Shingles vaccine, Zostavax, which is available only at the Pocatello office. No child will be denied routine vaccinations based on inability to pay. Please contact your local health department for more information or an appointment.