

An important message to parents and caregivers from Assistant Surgeon General, Dr. Anne Schuchat

When you're a parent or caregiver for a child, you're like an umbrella. Not only do you have to be ready to offer protection at any given moment, but you never know what's going to be raining down. It's often up to you to be that layer protecting your children from the elements, whether it's making sure the carseat is secure or insisting on broccoli before dessert. Today, let me remind you that **you can shield your children** from something you may take for granted—vaccine-preventable diseases.

Approximately one million kids in the U.S. are not fully immunized by two years old. While the occurrence of most vaccine preventable diseases is declining; we have seen resurgence of whooping cough (also called pertussis) over the past few years. In 2006, there were over 15,000 cases of whooping cough reported nationally. To prevent whooping cough, a child needs four doses of a vaccine called DTaP by age two. It can be hard to get your children to the doctor or clinic for their immunizations, but that fourth dose is critical to protect them against this serious and sometimes deadly disease. You can sometimes use a "sick visit" to catch up on immunizations; ask your doctor or nurse. It's not just kids that need shots—did you know that grownups can spread pertussis to others, too? Ask your healthcare provider about a pertussis booster shot for adults and pre-teens to protect the entire family, including infants who haven't been completely immunized from this serious disease.

Just as an umbrella can collapse in the wind, protection from childhood diseases can break down if vaccinations are missed or doses skipped. The sad fact is that low immunization rates can lead to outbreaks—clusters of disease—that can hospitalize or even kill children who are not up-to-date on their immunizations.

April 25-May 2, 2009, is National Infant Immunization Week. All around the country, doctors, nurses, clinics, and parents will be working together to get children caught up on their immunizations. Our goal is that every child will be immunized "on time, every time" by two years old. Don't wait until a child goes to school to catch up on vaccinations—you would be shocked to know how vulnerable your infant or baby is without the recommended immunizations. Older brothers and sisters, relatives, or even a trip to the grocery store can expose an infant to disease. By boosting babies' immune systems through vaccination, they are protected from what used to be common childhood diseases.

The good news is that we are fortunate in this country to have free and low-cost vaccination programs. **There are 14 diseases you can protect your child against by immunizing them on time before they turn two years old.** We have seen a great reduction in many diseases, and we want to continue that trend. I urge you to continue to be your children's umbrella, shielding and protecting them.

How can you do this?

- (1) Make sure your child is up-to-date on immunizations; visit CDC's childhood scheduler online at http://www2a.cdc.gov/nip/kidstuff/newscheduler_le/ find out what immunizations your child needs;
- (2) get an immunization card or record, and bring it to every doctors visit;
- (3) ask at every visit if your child needs an immunization;
- (4) talk with your child's doctor or healthcare provider, and don't be afraid to ask questions; and
- (5) visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines> or call 1-800-CDC-INFO for more information on immunizations.

*The Immunization Reminder Information System of Idaho will keep a record of all your child's immunizations. Parents can sign up at their doctor's or Health Department office so the child's immunization record will never be lost.