

IMMUNIZATIONS

At the beginning of the 20th Century, infectious disease caused most of the illness and death in children. The first public health revolution promoted immunizations, pasteurization, and improved nutrition and sanitation. This resulted in dramatic reductions in the child death rate – making it 25 times less likely to occur. One major disease, smallpox, has effectively been eliminated in the world as a result of immunizations.

There has been great success in reducing contagious disease through immunization mandates. Measles, as one example, infected 3 to 4 million people in the 1950's and 1960's, whereas, there were only 100 cases in the U.S. last year. Routine childhood immunizations are among the most effective preventive health measures, yet an increasing percentage of parents are hesitant to have their children vaccinated. Most parents today have never seen the preventable diseases that vaccines prevent and do not understand how serious they can be. The media and the Internet highlight links between vaccines and potential adverse conditions that sound plausible but are not supported by scientific fact. Parents must understand that there are, in fact, very real risks from not receiving vaccinations. When people refuse vaccines, all citizens in the community are placed at greater risk. Efforts must be made to address parents' concerns in order to improve immunization rates.



In Louisiana,
78% of
2- year-olds are
up-to-date with
their
immunizations
– a rate lower
than **45** other
states

As new vaccines and biomedical advances are approved, ongoing education is needed to provide information about how they can effectively prevent disease. For example, one newly approved vaccine prevents cervical cancer. Since this is not a disease transmitted by casual contact, a shift in thinking is needed to inform public policy regarding mandates for the use of such vaccines. Educational campaigns may be more practical than mandates for such vaccines.

Ideally, vaccinations should be coordinated with other health care services and provided in the medical home. This would allow the health care provider to review the vaccination status of the child at every encounter. All barriers to immunizations should be identified and addressed and parents and older children should be educated about the benefits and risks of vaccination in a culturally appropriate manner and in easy to understand language. All providers of immunization services should be encouraged to participate in Louisiana's Immunization Network for Kids Statewide (LINKS) and add their data to this registry so that immunization records can be accessed electronically as needed.

IMMUNIZATIONS (continued)

The Louisiana Office of Public Health operates the federal Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program which provides free vaccines for low-income children. This program should work effectively with private physicians and public clinics to make certain that children receive needed vaccines. A statewide advisory council of providers should be established to assure the effective operation of this program. Consideration should be given to expansion of the VFC program to provide vaccines for all children, regardless of family income.

Investments in vaccine programs provide significant cost benefit. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that every dollar spent on immunization saves \$6.30 in direct medical costs and \$18.40 in total costs including missed work, disability and death.

Additional policy recommendations to maximize immunizations for children include:

- provide adequate reimbursement for Medicaid and private insurance administration of vaccines
- provide access to biomedical products that prevent diseases such as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), a common cause of viral death in children under 5 years of age, in Medicaid and private insurance
- monitor immunization records for school-age children and enforce the law that prevents them from attending school if they are not up-to-date
- embrace newly approved vaccines and assure that the Louisiana Office of Public Health incorporates them into the required schedule in a timely manner
- allow nurses to administer vaccines without a physician present in locations such as school-based health clinics
- expand the Nurse Family Partnership Program that works with high-risk mothers to assure that their children have needed immunizations

For additional information please go to www.lapartnership.org.



**For every \$1
spent on
immunizations,
\$24.70 is saved
in direct
medical costs
and indirect
costs**