

Get Kids Up-To-Date On Vaccines Before They Go Back To School

(NAPSA)—Attention moms and dads! We know your back-to-school season checklist is already full with summer camps, shopping, play dates and maybe another trip to the beach or the lake. However, there's one more thing that you shouldn't forget—the back-to-school wellness checkup!

Even if immunization records are not required for school entry, the summer is a perfect time to schedule your child's annual physical exam. During this checkup, your child will be measured, weighed and checked for overall wellness. Your doctor will also make sure your child is up-to-date on all appropriate vaccines.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) includes the chickenpox vaccine on its list of recommended vaccines for school-age children. Chickenpox (also called varicella) is a highly contagious disease. The most common symptoms of chickenpox are rash, fever, headache and general discomfort. Although usually mild, chickenpox can sometimes lead to less common but serious complications such as pneumonia.

"Vaccines can be an incredibly valuable tool for maintaining children's health. Between the introduction of the chickenpox vaccine in 1995 and 2003-04, there was an 85 percent decline in chickenpox disease," said Keith S. Reisinger, M.D., MPH, a pediatrician in Pittsburgh, Pa. and medical director of Primary Physicians Research.

VARIVAX[®] (Varicella Virus Vaccine Live) helps prevent chickenpox in people 12 months of age and older.

Your child should not get VARIVAX if he or she is allergic to any of its ingredients, including gelatin and neomycin; has a weakened immune system, such as an immune deficiency, an inherited immune disorder, leukemia, lymphoma or HIV/AIDS; takes high doses of steroids by mouth or in a shot; has active tuberculosis that is not treated; has a fever; is pregnant or plans to get pregnant within the next three months.

VARIVAX is given as a shot to people who are 12 months old or older. If your child is 12 months to 12 years old and your doctor gives a second dose, the second dose must be given at least 3 months after the first shot.

A second dose should be given to those who first get the vaccine when they are 13 years old or older. This second dose should be given 4 to 8 weeks after the first dose.



Back-to-school wellness checkups help ensure children are up-to-date on vaccinations

Your doctor or health care provider will use the official recommendations to decide the number of shots needed and when to get them.

For a complete 2009 vaccination schedule visit the CDC's Web site at: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/child-schedule.htm.

Data from a CDC survey showed that less than 20 percent of adolescents 13-17 years of age without a history of disease had received both recommended doses of the chickenpox vaccine.

"The two-dose recommendation was instituted in 2006 to help further reduce outbreaks and provide better individual protection," said Dr. Reisinger. "We've made great strides in increasing immunization rates across the board but we have some work to do with making sure more kids receive both doses of the chickenpox vaccine."

The implementation of a chickenpox vaccination program has significantly reduced the frequency and severity of chickenpox in the U.S. Because it is better to help prevent a disease than to treat it, parents should talk to their child's doctor to make sure appropriate vaccines are received on time.

Important Information About VARIVAX

Your child should not take aspirin or aspirin-containing products for 6 weeks after getting VARIVAX.

VARIVAX may not protect everyone who gets it. VARIVAX does not treat chickenpox once your child has it.

The most common side effects are fever; pain, swelling, itching, or redness at the site of the shot; chicken-pox like rash on the body or at the site of the shot; irritability. Your doctor has a more complete list of side effects for VARIVAX.

Prescribing information and patient product information for VARIVAX are attached, and are also available at www.merckvaccines.com.

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