

Health Bulletin



Childhood Immunization Rates At Record High Levels

(NAPSA)—According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the nation's childhood immunization rates are at record high levels, including significant increases in rates of immunization for chickenpox and pneumococcal pneumonia, the two most recent additions to the childhood immunization schedule.

National coverage with chickenpox vaccine increased from 80.6 percent in 2002 to 84.8 percent in 2003. Coverage for three or more doses of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine increased from 40.9 percent to 68.1 percent, and coverage for four or more doses of pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, reported for the first time this year, was 36.7 percent. Coverage for all other childhood vaccines and series increased significantly in 2003 compared with 2002.

"The only way to contain and ultimately eliminate deadly diseases like polio, measles and chickenpox is through high immunization rates," says David Neumann, executive director, National Partnership for Immunization.

"We need to thank everyone who has helped put childhood vaccination rates at an all-time high—and then we all need to get back to work and help make this rate go even higher," says Tommy G. Thompson, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services. "Childhood vaccination is a key element of equal opportunity for Americans, and we need to reach all children and protect them."

Understanding the risks

Denver mom and nurse practitioner Jodi Wild faced the horror of influenza when her 2-year-old daughter suffered severe cardiac complications from the disease. Today, Wild urges parents to have



Children's health is getting a shot in the arm from an increased number of immunizations.

children, especially those between 6 and 23 months, immunized against influenza.

A \$70 shot could have protected college freshman John Kach from a near-fatal form of bacterial meningitis. Luckily, Kach survived the disease, though doctors had to amputate part of one leg, five of his toes and all 10 fingers.

Most states do not require incoming college students to be immunized against meningitis but many have enacted or are considering legislation requiring education about the disease and the vaccine.

"We must not let down our guard," cautions Neumann. "Many vaccine preventable diseases still exist in the United States and run rampant in other parts of the world. We must continue to expand immunization coverage to ensure that all children, teens and adults are protected."

To learn more about current immunization guidelines, visit www.cdc.gov, www.partnersforimmunization.org or www.hhs.gov.