



# Pointers For Parents

## Improved Childhood Immunization Rates

(NAPSA)—Whether it's updating children's immunizations before school or getting them immunized against seasonal viruses, it's important for parents and medical professionals alike to make sure children in their communities are up-to-date with their immunizations.

To help, the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation (AAFP Foundation), through a grant from Pfizer Inc, recognizes family medicine residency programs that are developing solutions to improve childhood immunization rates—that may be helpful to families everywhere.

"Keeping children and adults safe from some of the world's most deadly diseases is easily done with one of the most effective health care tools ever developed: vaccinations," says Dr. Richard Roberts, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation. "Making sure that children are immunized at the right age makes our entire community a healthier place to live. We hope the positive changes put in place by the residency programs will inspire other physicians and their office staffs to improve their immunization systems, too."

One of the award winners is the Western Reserve Care System Family Medicine Residency in Youngstown, Ohio. Director Lisa Weiss, M.D., FFAFP, and her team won the "Most Improved" award for improving their immunization system and, in turn, increasing immunization rates in their community. The program was a recipient of last year's "System Implementation" grant to fund ideas proposed by the program, demonstrating the impact of creative ideas, commitment and support from grants such as these. The program faced several challenges—including the community's low socioeconomic status and poor insurance coverage—that contributed to childhood immunization rates of only 72 percent. It was crucial for Dr. Weiss and her team to involve everyone



**Make sure your child is up-to-date with immunizations.**

in the program to better serve the health of the entire community.

### Checking Immunizations at Every Visit

The residency program aims to increase immunization rates by requiring the staff and physicians to check children's immunizations at every doctor's appointment, including check-ups and sick visits. The staff prints out the child's immunization record and—using the electronic medical records and/or the state immunizations registry—compares against the recommended immunization schedule. This schedule is also posted at all work stations and is taught to the staff throughout the year. If there are any missing immunizations, the staff advises administering the immunization during the same visit.

### Educating Parents About Immunizations

The residency program also seeks to educate patients and caregivers early and often about the importance of immunizations. The program developed a position for a nurse educator to address the topic of immunizations as early as during prenatal check-ups with expecting parents, as well as immediately following childbirth. The staff also raises awareness by placing educational posters in high-traffic areas of the office and discussing immunizations during every doctor's appointment.

### Offering Open Scheduling

Finally, to increase childhood

immunization rates, the residency program offers open scheduling to accommodate parents' busy schedules. While physicians allot a couple hours in the morning for parents who prefer to preschedule appointments, the remainder of the day is open for same-day appointments and walk-ins. The convenience of open scheduling has had a significant impact, as the "no-show" rate has decreased from more than 25 percent to less than 10 percent.

Within one year, the program increased rates by 17 percent to 89 percent. Improving childhood immunization rates is critical to enhancing the health of all children and families, and the AAFP Foundation hopes the positive changes implemented by the Western Reserve Care System Family Medicine Residency program will inspire other physicians and their staffs to improve their immunization systems as well.

For more information, including a tip sheet of best practices from past winners, please visit [www.aafpfoundation.org/immunizationawards](http://www.aafpfoundation.org/immunizationawards).

### Immunization Tips For Parents:

- Use a family calendar on the refrigerator that keeps track of your child's upcoming doctors' appointments.
- Make sure your child is up-to-date with immunizations by requesting an immunization card from your doctor and updating it at every visit.
- Help make your child's vaccine experience easier by staying calm, distracting him or her during the injection and giving a reward afterwards with a small present or a snack.
- After each appointment, schedule your child's next follow-up visit.
- If you have any questions or concerns about immunizations, bring a list to your child's next visit to discuss with the doctor.

