

Are Your Kids Up to Date?

School is back in session, and health care professionals want parents to remember that getting ready for school should also include up-to-date immunizations.

August marks National Immunization Awareness Month, and by keeping up with a recommended vaccine schedule, you can help prevent disease throughout their lifetime.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that childhood vaccines have prevented an estimated 855,000 deaths and 381 million illnesses in the U.S. from 1994 to 2016.

The CDC recommends that children be vaccinated for 16 diseases and viruses, including the flu, measles, chicken pox, whooping cough and polio. Children and teenagers are also advised to receive boosters for various vaccines after receiving an initial immunization.

“You always want to follow the recommendations that have been put out by the American Academy of Pediatrics or the CDC. Those are the two entities that we follow. They have through research found what the prime ages are to boost your immunity against certain diseases. And so based on that research, that is how it is calculated when you get those immunizations,” explained Dr. Samina Yousuf, an OSF HealthCare pediatrician in Bloomington, Illinois.

Vaccination not only protects your children from illness, but it also protects the community around you, especially those who are unable to be vaccinated, like babies and people with weakened immune systems.

In communities with low vaccination rates, when one person is infected, disease can spread quickly to others who are not vaccinated. In communities where the overwhelming majority of people are vaccinated, there are fewer opportunities for the disease to spread, often called “herd immunity.”

“Herd immunity is defined as the immunity in a population or community. If that community is approximately 85% or more vaccinated against a disease, then everybody in that community can be protected,” said Dr. Yousuf.

Education and awareness are critical to increasing vaccination rates. Dr. Yousuf warns that there is extensive misinformation circulating about the safety of vaccines, and parents should always talk to their child’s pediatrician about any concerns.

She says physicians are normally willing to work with parents and patients to achieve the end result of immunization.

“I have patients who are on an alternative vaccination schedule. It just means they come in every month because they don’t want to get three vaccinations at one time, and that is totally fine,” said Dr. Yousuf. She continued, “But we are big proponents of getting vaccinations done. We are happy to work with you, and we’re happy to answer questions.”

And remember, vaccines are not just for kids; they are recommended throughout our lives. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), adults should get the flu vaccine each year and receive a Td (tetanus and diphtheria) booster vaccine or Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) every 10 years.

Adults may need other vaccines depending on their age, if pregnant, occupation, travel, medical conditions, or vaccinations they have already received.

Talk to your primary care physician about your current vaccination needs. If you don't have a primary care physician, you can find one at OSFHealthCare.org.