



1573 Selby Avenue, Suite 234 • St. Paul, Minnesota 55104 • Phone 651-647-9009 • Fax 651-647-9131

EMAIL admin@immunize.org

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Julie Murphy
julie@immunize.org
(651) 647-9009

New IAC Guidebook Helps Birthing Institutions *Give birth to the end of Hep B*

IAC Recognizes Albany Medical Center for Achieving 99% Birth Dose Coverage Rate

St. Paul, Minnesota – The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) is urging hospitals and birthing centers to *Give birth to the end of Hep B* with the launch of its new comprehensive guidebook “Hepatitis B: What Hospitals Need to Do to Protect Newborns.” Endorsed by the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this resource breaks new ground as a policy and best practice guide for newborn hepatitis B immunization.

Experts agree that hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection can be eliminated, and that preventing transmission at birth is fundamental to this effort. Yet nearly one in three newborns leaves the hospital unprotected by hepatitis B vaccine, despite national recommendations to provide it before the newborn is discharged from the hospital.

“Hospitals and birthing centers have a responsibility to protect babies from life-threatening hepatitis B infection,” says IAC Executive Director Dr. Deborah Wexler. “A birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine can protect most of the approximately 800 U.S. newborns who become chronically infected with hepatitis B each year through perinatal exposure.”

The national standard of care to prevent HBV infection in babies is to administer hepatitis B vaccine to all newborns before they leave the hospital or birthing center. This standard is being adopted by centers of healthcare excellence nationwide as a safety net to protect newborns from a wide range of medical errors that lead to babies being unprotected from perinatal hepatitis B infection.

Today, in Albany, New York, IAC and the New York State Department of Health (DOH) Immunization Bureau honored the Albany Medical Center (AMC), for reaching a hepatitis B vaccine birth dose coverage rate of 99%. AMC is a 631-bed hospital providing delivery services for approximately 2,100 births each year. In honor of its achievement, AMC also became the inaugural member of IAC’s new Hepatitis B Birth Dose Honor Roll, which recognizes hospitals and birthing centers that have attained high coverage rates for administering hepatitis B vaccine at birth.

Since 1990, the New York State DOH has conducted a perinatal HBV surveillance and prevention program, which mandates universal testing of all pregnant women and reporting and treatment of all infants born to hepatitis B positive mothers. The perinatal hepatitis B prevention program has greatly



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improved the birth dose rates in New York largely because of DOH's established standard for vaccination of all newborns with hepatitis B vaccines within 12 hours of birth.

"I commend Albany Medical Center for their commitment to the best practice of hepatitis B vaccination and treatment of newborns in their care," said New York State Health Commissioner Nirav R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H. "Studies have shown nearly 90 percent of perinatal hepatitis B virus infections can be prevented through vaccination, but far too many newborns don't receive such treatment after discharge from the hospital. Vaccinating newborns within 12 hours of birth has proven highly effective in protecting infants from the hepatitis B virus and the other diseases it may cause during their lifetimes."

For more information about IAC's campaign to prevent hepatitis B transmission at birth, and to download "Hepatitis B: What Hospitals Need to Do to Protect Newborns," visit <http://www.immunize.org/protect-newborns>.

About the Immunization Action Coalition

IAC's immunization educational tools have a strong impact on the education, attitudes, and practices of healthcare professionals throughout the nation, making IAC one of the most respected and relied-upon immunization organizations in the United States. IAC is also a direct source of immunization information for the public. IAC's two major websites receive more than 20,000 visits per day, and its email news service broadcasts weekly immunization updates to nearly 50,000 opt-in subscribers. For more information, visit www.immunize.org.