

A commitment to providing immunization information

Coalition's efforts to keep the health care community up-to-date



Deborah L. Wexler, M.D.

Executive director,
Immunization Action
Coalition

Deborah L. Wexler, M.D., is the founder and executive director of the Immunization Action Coalition. In the 1980s as a family practice resident in Wisconsin, Wexler developed a great interest in hepatitis B. In 1986, she moved back to the Twin Cities where she first joined the staff of the Indian Health Board Clinic in Minneapolis, and in 1988, the West Side Community Health Center in St. Paul. In 1990, Wexler, along with others, founded the Hepatitis B Coalition, which evolved to become the Immunization Action Coalition in 1994. Wexler received her M.D. degree in 1982 from the University of Minnesota.

The Immunization Action Coalition (IAC), and the Hepatitis B Coalition from which it evolved, are grassroots coalitions that grew from concerned health care providers determined to be sure their patients were fully vaccinated and educated about the importance of vaccines. Today, IAC creates and distributes accurate, practical immunization information on its Web sites and through print publications. The organization's goal is to keep health care providers, parents, and the public up-to-date on changes in vaccine licensures, recommendations, and benefits. It advocates immunizing people of all ages appropriately against all vaccine-preventable diseases.

Recent changes in vaccinations

As children head back to school, it is time to revisit their immunization records. You may think your children are up-to-date, but many changes have occurred in the world of vaccines in recent months.

For younger children

Most parents are familiar with the routine vaccinations: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis or whooping cough (DTaP); polio; mumps, measles, rubella (MMR); chickenpox; Haemophilus influenzae type b; pneumococcal; and hepatitis B (see the article on page 26). But that might not be all your child needs! Recent new vaccines and recommendations include the following:

1. Influenza vaccine is recommended each fall for all children from 6 months to 5 years of age and all their household members. This means older brothers and sisters and moms and dads, too.
2. Two doses of hepatitis A vaccine are recommended for all one-year-old children. Discuss your older children's need for this vaccine with your health care professional.
3. It is anticipated that in August the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will recommend giving rotavirus vaccine (drops) to all infants at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. Rotavirus causes serious diarrhea in infants and toddlers. Be sure to ask your doctor about this vaccine for children under 12 months of age.
4. CDC now recommends a second dose of varicella vaccine at kindergarten entry and a second dose for older children who have only received one dose.

For older children and teens

In addition to receiving the traditional vaccines discussed above, older children receive tetanus, diphtheria (Td) vaccine at 11 to 12 years of age, as well as "catch up" doses of any vaccines missed earlier. But as of last year, additional vaccines have been

recommended for your children in middle school, high school, and college.

1. Tdap, which prevents tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis, now replaces the Td dose for 11 to 12 year olds. Before Tdap was licensed, pertussis vaccine was available only for children age 6 years and younger. Tdap helps keep preteens, teens, and adults from getting pertussis, and also protects the infants around them for whom pertussis can be life threatening. Older teens who have missed Tdap at 11 or 12 years old should also get one dose.

2. Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MCV) was newly licensed and recommended in 2005. A dose of MCV has been recommended for all children 11 to 12 years of age, teens at high school entry, and freshmen living in college dormitories. At this time, there is a shortage of MCV, so the federal government has recommended that 11 and 12 year olds delay vaccination to make sure older teens and college students are vaccinated.

Meningococcal disease is the leading cause of bacterial meningitis in older children and teens.

3. Influenza vaccine is recommended for many children 5 years and older (in addition to

younger children as mentioned above). For example, flu vaccine is recommended for all siblings of children under 5 and all children with lung, heart, or kidney disease. Check with your doctor about your child's need for influenza vaccine. An abundant supply of influenza vaccines is expected to be available this year, including the nasal spray form for children 5 and older who prefer "needle-free delivery."

Cervical cancer vaccine

In June, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) licensed a new vaccine to protect preteen, teen, and young adult women from cervical cancer. An enormously important development, the HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine has been approved for use in girls and women ages 9 to 26 years. Now the CDC has approved its use for all girls and women ages 11-26 years.

How to stay up-to-date

The IAC's Web site for the general public, www.vaccineinformation.org, gives parents information about all the diseases for which vaccines are licensed in the U.S. Other resources are the Children's Immunization Support Program, American Academy of Pediatrics (www.cispimmunize.org/) and the CDC's National Immunization Program (www.cdc.gov/nip).

Many changes have occurred in the world of vaccines in recent months.