

The Importance of Immunizations

Mendocino County residents are blessed with many activities and opportunities that enhance their health and wellbeing, such as outdoor recreation, children's summer camps, and ideal growing conditions for many fruits and vegetables. One important element in promoting health is vaccination against infectious diseases—a health promotion strategy in which our county lags behind others.

Immunizations play an important role in maintaining health and preventing disease across the lifespan. During pregnancy, flu can cause serious problems for the mother and her baby. Pertussis, or “whooping cough,” also can be deadly for new babies, but they are too young to be immunized against these diseases. Some of the protection a pregnant woman gets from these shots passes to her baby in the womb. This will help protect her baby until he or she is old enough to be immunized against these diseases.ⁱ

We receive the majority of our vaccinations as infants and toddlers. This is because young children have not had the chance to build up their immunity and are especially susceptible to complications of infectious diseases. Parents may have questions and concerns about the safety of immunizations given during infancy and childhood. Topics such as autism, preservatives used in vaccines, and alternative schedules are addressed in *Vaccine Safety: Answers to Parents' Top Questions* from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH).ⁱⁱ In short, exhaustive research has determined that vaccines do not cause autism. These studies included hundreds of thousands of children, occurred in multiple countries, were conducted by multiple investigators, and were well controlled.

The summer months are the perfect time to get children, preteens, and teens up to date on their immunizations. California childcare centers and schools require certain immunizations for entry—visit <http://www.shotsforschool.org/> for valuable information on school requirements.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend vaccination against Human Papillomavirus (HPV) for both boys and girls beginning at 11 years of age. HPV causes cancers of the mouth and throat, cervix, vagina, penis, and anus. Vaccinating against HPV greatly reduces the risk of developing these cancers.^{iv}

Certain vaccines are recommended during adulthood,^v and will not only help prevent disease for yourself but also help protect those around you. The Tdap vaccine is recommended for parents, grandparents, and caregivers of infants to help protect infants while they are most vulnerable to pertussis. An annual flu vaccine is recommended to everyone 6 months of age and older. The pneumococcal vaccine^{vi} is recommended for those with chronic health conditions as well as anyone 65 years of age and older.

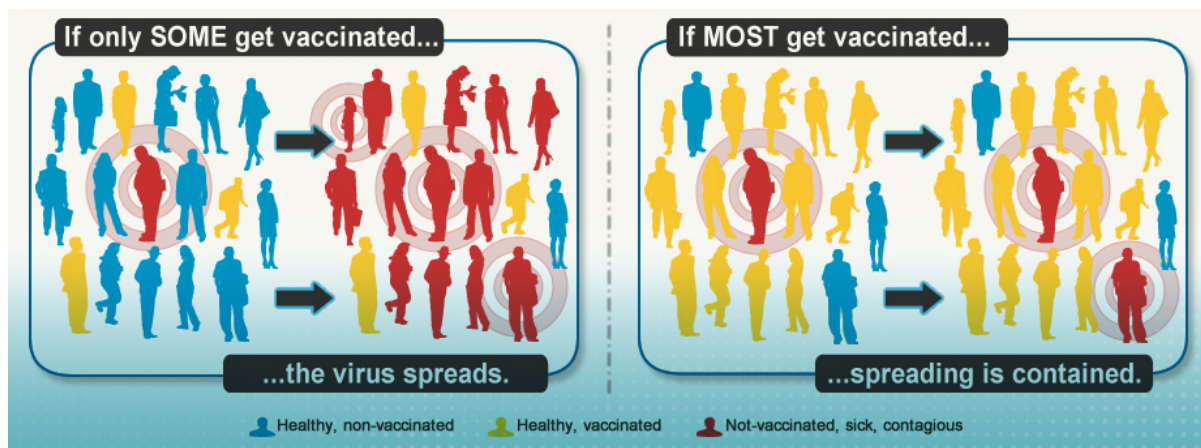
If you like to travel abroad, there are vaccines that will help protect you from diseases that are much more common in other parts of the world, such as yellow fever, typhoid, and rabies. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers an [online tool](#) to help you determine which travel vaccines are recommended for the country you plan to visit.^{vii}

Our community becomes vulnerable by not vaccinating; and a case that could touch off an outbreak of an infectious disease that is currently under control is just a plane ride away.^{viii} This

became evident during the 2014/2015 measles outbreak that originated at Disneyland. Dr. Karen Smith, director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and state health officer, states, “We are pleased this outbreak is over, but [we] caution that measles can be reintroduced in California at any time when an infected person brings it to the state. The best defense for protection against the highly infectious measles is vaccination.”^{ix}

Community immunity, formerly referred to as “herd immunity,” exists when a community has a sufficient immunization level to protect those who are unvaccinated. About 80% to 94% of people need to be vaccinated to shield those who are at greatest risk,^x including:

- Infants too young to be immunized
- People with weakened immune systems due to disease or medications such as asthma, cancer, or chemotherapy
- Unvaccinated pregnant women
- The elderly
- Anyone unable to receive vaccines due to severe allergic reaction



Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/images/vaccines-protect.jpg>

So what is the current state of community immunity in Mendocino County? According to the Healthy Mendocino Community Dashboard on Kindergartners with Required Immunizations and the CDPH, 81.2% of kindergartners in our county were up to date in 2014, while the state average was 90.4%.^{xi} 91.3% of Mendocino County 7th graders were up to date on the required Tdap immunization, compared to the state average of 97.8%.^{xii} Several schools and child care centers in our county have immunization rates under 70%, which puts unvaccinated students at increased risk for contracting vaccine-preventable diseases. Want to know the vaccination rates at your child’s school? Visit <http://www.shotsforschool.org/> for an interactive map detailing percentage of students who are up to date on required immunizations.

What can we do to help keep our community healthy?

- **Get your family immunized.** Vaccines remain the best protection against many serious diseases.
- **Seek reliable information from trusted sources.** There is a lot of conflicting advice out there; bring questions and sources to your family doctor.

-- **Practice healthy habits.** Wash hands often, cough/sneeze into a sleeve instead of your hands, and stay home when sick.^{xiii}

The CDPH recommends these trusted websites for information on immunizations:

American Academy of Pediatrics

<http://www2.aap.org/immunization/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>

Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

<http://vec.chop.edu/service/vaccine-education-center/home.html>

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

<http://www.vaccines.gov/>

Evaluating Health Information on the Web

<http://www.immunizationinfo.org/>

Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/in-depth/vaccines/art-20048334>

Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases

<http://www.pkids.org/>

Thimerosal FAQs

<http://www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/SafetyAvailability/VaccineSafety/UCM096228>

Vaccines: Calling the Shots (PBS documentary)

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/body/vaccines-calling-shots.html>

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ⁱ Immunizations for a Health Pregnancy. California Department of Public Health. February 2015.

<http://www.eziz.org/assets/docs/IMM-887.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Vaccine Safety: Answers to Parents’ Top Questions. California Department of Public Health. June 2015.

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/immunize/Pages/Default.aspx>

ⁱⁱⁱ ShotsforSchool. California Department of Public Health. <http://www.shotsforschool.org/>

^{iv} HPV Vaccine Information for Clinicians—Fact Sheet. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. July 2012.

^v There Are Vaccines You Need as an Adult. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. July 2014.

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/index.html>

^{vi} Pneumococcal Vaccine: Who Needs It? Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. February 2015.

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pneumo/vacc-in-short.htm>

^{vii} Travelers’ Health. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list>

^{viii} What Would Happen if We Stopped Vaccinations? Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. May 2014.

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/whatifstop.htm>

^{ix} Measles Outbreak That Began in December Now Over. California Department of Public Health. April 2015.

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/Pages/NR15-029.aspx>

^x Community Immunity: The role of vaccine sin keeping our communities healthy. California Immunization Coalition. February 2012. http://www.immunizeca.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/IMM-1056_web.pdf

^{xi} 2014- 2015 Kindergarten Immunization Assessment Results. California Department of Public Health, Immunization Branch. <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/immunize/Documents/2014-15%20CA%20Kindergarten%20Immunization%20Assessment.pdf>

^{xii} 2014-2015 7th Grade Immunization Assessment Results. California Department of Public Health, Immunization Branch. <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/immunize/Documents/2014-15%20CA%20Seventh%20Grade%20Immunization%20Assessment.pdf>

^{xiii} ^{xiii} Community Immunity: The role of vaccine sin keeping our communities healthy. California Immunization Coalition. February 2012. http://www.immunizeca.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/IMM-1056_web.pdf