

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Plan for School Success by Planning for Good Health!

Back packs, pencils, note books – Check! Brown bags, tennis shoes, rulers – Check! But what about Shots? The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wants to encourage you to help your pre-teen and teenage students be fully prepared for school by being fully immunized. Immunizations help protect your kids from contracting easily preventable diseases. And by immunizing them, you can also help to protect others as well.

According to Jo Ann Wilczynski, Director of Prevention Services at the tri-county agency, “Keeping up-to-date on immunizations is an important step in your student’s success. A healthy student is more able to fully participate in their learning. While childhood vaccines have done much to reduce many diseases in the United States, vacationers can bring old and new diseases back into the country. Measles, for example, is still prevalent in other parts of the world and has been linked to recent outbreaks in the U.S. Also, studies have shown that protection provided by some vaccines given early in life – like chickenpox - may wear off as your student ages. Either way, unvaccinated or under-vaccinated - children are at risk.”

In addition to the flu vaccine which preteens and teens should receive every year, there are four vaccines recommended. These vaccines can be started when kids are 11 to 12 years old and include:

- **Tdap vaccine** is a booster against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. Pertussis, or whooping cough, can keep kids out of school and activities for weeks. It can also be spread to babies, which can be very dangerous.

- **Meningococcal vaccine** protects against meningococcal disease. Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria. It's a leading cause of bacterial meningitis (a serious infection around the brain and spinal cord) and its complications.
- **HPV vaccine** protects both males and females against certain types of Human Papillomavirus. This virus is a common cause of cervical cancer in women. HPV vaccine can also help protect boys against genital warts and anal cancer.
- **Varicella vaccine** is a booster and protects against chickenpox. Recent studies have shown that children need two doses of the vaccine if they do not have a history of having the disease.

Families with children age 18 or younger, who are uninsured or whose insurance does not cover immunizations, may be eligible for free vaccinations through the health department's Vaccines for Children program (VFC). The health department offers immunization clinics once a week at each of its county offices:

- Branch County on Mondays
- Hillsdale County on Wednesdays
- St. Joseph County on Tuesdays

Contact the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency county office to schedule an appointment or go to our website at www.bhsj.org to view the recommended vaccination schedule. Helping your student be successful in school begins with helping them to be healthy.