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For parents, sending teens and young adults back to school can be an extremely busy time. Amidst all the back-to-school season planning and shopping for new clothes and school supplies, health care can sometimes be overlooked. The back-to-school season is an opportune time for your teen or young adult to get their annual checkup and any recommended vaccines, including those to help protect against meningococcal disease.

Meningococcal disease, often referred to as meningitis, is a bacterial infection that can cause inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. The bacteria can also enter the bloodstream and multiply, causing serious blood infections. There are five common groups of bacteria that cause the disease in the U.S. – A, B, C, W and Y.

“Meningococcal group B disease, also known as MenB, accounts for nearly 50 percent of all U.S. cases of meningococcal disease in



17-to-23-year-olds,” said Dr. Richard Chung, Director of Adolescent Medicine at Duke University. “However, a recent national survey revealed that parents of teens and young adults ages 16 to 23 may be unaware of some important information about this uncommon, but potentially serious disease.”

The National Meningococcal Disease Awareness Survey, which was

conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of Pfizer in partnership with The Kimberly Coffey Foundation, evaluated parents’ knowledge of meningococcal disease and available vaccines. After learning about the differences between the two types of meningococcal vaccines (MCV4 and MenB), nearly 4 in 5 parents (79 percent) did not know that their child wasn’t fully immunized

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Timely vaccines important for disease protection

Parents agree that feeding and sleep schedules are important to help keep their children healthy. The same goes for childhood immunizations. Vaccinating children on time is the best way to protect them against 14 serious and potentially deadly diseases before their second birthday.

“The recommended immunization schedule is designed to protect babies early in life, when they are vulnerable and before it’s likely that they will be exposed to diseases,” said Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Public health and medical experts base their vaccine recommendations on many factors. They study information about diseases and vaccines very carefully to decide which vaccines kids should get and when they should get them for best protection.

Although the number of vaccines a child needs in the first two years may seem like a lot, doctors know a great deal about the human immune system, and they know that a healthy baby’s immune system can handle getting all vaccines when they are recommended.



Messonnier cautions against parents delaying vaccination. “There is no known benefit to delaying vaccination. In fact, it puts babies at risk of getting sick because they are left vulnerable to catch serious diseases during the time they are not protected by vaccines.”

When parents choose not to vaccinate or to follow a delayed schedule, children are left unprotected against diseases that still circulate in this country, like measles and whooping cough. Since 2010, we have seen between 10,000 and 50,000 cases of whooping cough each year in the United States. And, up

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Vaccines: They’re not just for kids

By **DINA MENDROS**
Associate Editor

BIDDEFORD — Now that it’s time to go back to school, it’s also a good time to think about whether your child’s vaccinations are up to date, advises Dr. Dora Mills, vice president for clinical affairs and director of the Center for Excellence in Health Innovation at the University of New England.

In addition to vaccines for infants and small children, Mills says adolescents and adults also need to be immunized to protect themselves from a variety of diseases.

New parents are usually advised by their pediatricians what types of vaccines are needed to protect their little ones. They should be completed by the time a child is school age, as in many cases, the child won’t be allowed to start school without having the proper shots.

As we age, many of us think the time to worry about immunizations is over. That’s not the case, said Mills.

“Vaccines are not just for kids anymore,” she said.

After childhood immunizations, the next time parents need to think about vaccines is when their child becomes a tween.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adolescents receive the human papillomavirus, known as HPV, vaccine at age 11 or 12. HPV can lead to cervical and other types of cancers.

“I have two teenagers,” Mills said. “They’re both vaccinated against HPV.”

Although the HPV shot can be given to adults up to 26, Mills said, it’s recommended to give it at a younger age. The “HPV vaccine also produces a more robust



Mills

immune response during the preteen years,” according to the CDC website.

It’s important to provide the vaccine early, as “85 percent of adolescents are exposed to HPV,” Mills said.

The HPV vaccine is recommended for boys as well as girls. In addition to leading to cervical cancer – which, prior to the pap smear test, was the leading cancer killer among women in the U.S. – HPV can be a factor in developing penile, anal and oral cancer, and can also lead to genital warts and other conditions.

Protection from this widespread virus is important, Mills said.

“Nearly 80 million people – about 1 in 4 – are infected (with the HPV virus) in the United States,” according to the CDC.

Once we’re adults, the need for vaccines doesn’t go away.

“A number of vaccines are for adults,” Mills said. For instance, she said, “everyone should get the flu shot every year.”

Then there’s the Td vaccine to protect against tetanus, which should be received every 10 years.

Older adults should be vaccinated to prevent shingles. The CDC recommends

Five important reasons to vaccinate your child

the vaccine for ages 60 and older, as anyone who had chicken pox is susceptible.

“Studies show that more than 99 percent of Americans aged 40 and older have had chickenpox, even if they don’t remember getting the disease,” according to the CDC.

Other vaccines that adults need are determined by factors such as age, lifestyle, job, health condition and prior vaccinations, Mills said.

For instance, those with a chronic disease, such as diabetes or heart disease, may need different immunizations.

People with heart disease have three times the risk of being hospitalized with the flu than those without, according to the CDC, so it’s especially important they get an annual flu shot. The CDC also recommends the pneumococcal vaccine to protect against pneumonia for those with heart disease.

There are different vaccination recommendations for pregnant women, health care professionals and others. Overseas travelers may also need to get special vaccines.

If you’re worried about the safety of vaccines, Mills said most people shouldn’t be.

“Vaccines are considered one of the – if not the – public health achievements of the 20th century,” she said. “People in their 80s and 90s remember people dying” from diseases that vaccines were created to protect us from.

“The memory of these diseases is fading, and (some parents) question why their children have to get shots,” Mills said. “It’s disheartening when I see misinformation about vaccinations.”

Some people have tried to make a connection between the rise in autism and vaccines. However, said Mills, there is no significant scientific evidence showing a connection. Even Autism Speaks, an organization advocating for those with autism, is a proponent of vaccines.

“Over the last two decades, extensive research has asked whether there is any link between childhood vaccinations and autism,” according to the organization’s website. “The results of this research are clear: Vaccines do not cause autism.”

For more information about vaccines and which ones you need, visit the CDC website at cdc.gov/vaccines.

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You want to do what is best for your children. You know about the importance of car seats, baby gates and other ways to keep them safe. But, did you know that one of the best ways to protect your children is to make sure they have all of their vaccinations?

Immunizations can save your child’s life. Because of advances in medical science, your child can be protected against more diseases than ever before.

Some diseases that once injured or killed thousands of children are no longer common in the U.S. – primarily due to safe and effective vaccines. Polio is one example of the great impact that vaccines have had in the United States. Polio was once America’s most feared disease, causing death and paralysis across the country, but thanks to vaccination the United States has been polio-free since 1979. Due to continual world-

wide vaccination efforts, Afghanistan and Pakistan are the only two countries in the world that have never interrupted the spread of wild poliovirus, and only small pockets of polio still exist in these countries.

Vaccination is very safe and effective.

Vaccines are only given to children after careful review by scientists, doctors, and healthcare professionals. Vaccine side effects are almost always mild such as redness or swelling at the site of the shot, but

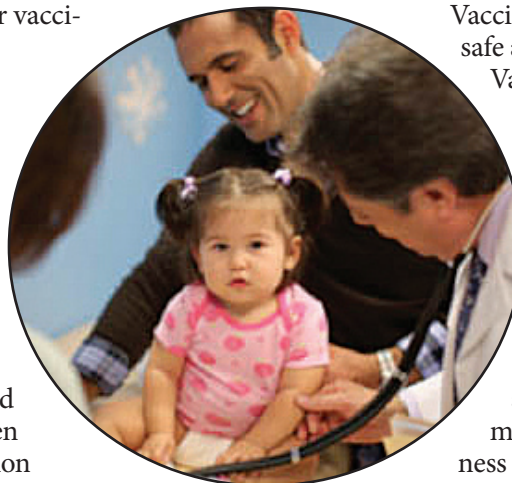
this is minimal compared to the pain, discomfort, and risk of injury and death from the diseases these vaccines prevent. Serious side effects following vaccination, such as severe allergic reaction, are very rare. The disease-prevention benefits of getting vaccinated are much greater than the

possible side effects for almost all children.

Immunization protects others you care about. Children in the U.S. still get vaccine-preventable diseases. In fact, we have seen resurgences of measles and whooping cough (pertussis) over the past few years. For example, in 2014, there were 667 cases of measles in 27 states, the greatest number of cases since measles was eliminated in 2000. The following year saw measles cases as well.

During 2015, 147 people were part of a large, multi-state measles outbreak linked to an amusement park in California. Almost one in 10 people who became sick with measles in this outbreak were babies too young to be vaccinated. While some babies are too young to be protected by vaccination, others may not be able to receive certain vaccinations due to severe allergies, weakened immune systems from conditions like leukemia, or other reasons. To help keep them safe, it is important that you and your children who are able to get vaccinated are fully immunized. This not only pro-

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Make your child’s shots less stressful

Vaccines help protect babies and young children against 14 serious diseases. Even though you are keeping her safe from diseases, it’s hard to see your child cry when she gets her shots. But you can take some steps before, during, and after a vaccine visit to ease the pain and stress of getting shots.

Read about the shots your child will get in advance. “CDC’s vaccine webpage has a lot of useful information to help parents understand the importance of on-time vaccination,” said Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “You can review this information before your appointment, and then you can ask your child’s doctor any remaining questions or concerns you have about vaccines.”

You may also want to bring your child’s vaccine record to show the doctor, and pack a favorite toy, book, blanket or other comfort item. For older children, be honest- shots can pinch or sting, but not for long. Remind them that shots help keep them healthy.

Distract your child with a toy, a story, a song, or something interesting in the room. Make eye contact with your child and smile, talk softly, or sing. Hold your child tightly on your lap, if you can. Take deep breaths with an older child to help “blow out” the pain.

After the shot, hug, cuddle, and praise your child. For babies, swaddling, breastfeeding, or a bottle may offer quick relief. Comfort and reassure older children if they cry.

If you notice redness, soreness, or swelling from the shot, place a clean, cool washcloth on the area. These

reactions are usually mild and resolve on their own without needing treatment. If your child runs a fever, try a cool sponge bath. You can also use a non-aspirin pain reliever if your doctor says it’s OK. Some children eat less, sleep more, or act fussy for a day after they get shots. Make sure your child gets plenty to drink. If you’re worried about anything, call your doctor.

“Remember,” added Messonnier, “keeping your child up-to-date on vaccines is the best way to protect against vaccine-preventable diseases.” Learn more about childhood vaccines at cdc.gov/vaccines/ parents.

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