



Houston Area Rotary Club

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For immediate release

**Houston Area Immunization Partnership Urges Parents of 7th Graders
to Take Action and Have their Kids Immunized**

- Community Awareness Campaign Aims to Spread the Word

HOUSTON (April 22, 2009) – Three new vaccines are essential for the 337,000 Texas students, including 73,923 Harris County students, entering seventh grade. The Texas Department of State Health Services is requiring that students receive the following vaccines before they enroll for the 2009-2010 school year:

- One dose of Meningococcal vaccine (Meningitis)
- One dose of Tdap vaccine - tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis (Whooping Cough)
- A second dose of Varicella vaccine (Chicken Pox)

“Dangerous diseases can be easily passed from one child to another, but many of them are easily preventable through immunization. It’s critical we have our children vaccinated to keep them healthy,” said Anna C. Dragsbaek, J.D., executive director, Houston Area Immunization Partnership. “We urge parents to act now, to avoid the back-to-school rush at doctors’ offices and to avoid delays in starting 7th grade.”

Over the last several years, we’ve heard a lot of stories about meningitis, a sometimes fatal disease. Meningococcal Disease is a severe bacterial infection that can cause meningitis. Symptoms of meningitis include fever, headache and a stiff neck, and often nausea, vomiting and mental status changes. Meningococcal bacteremia can result in joint infection, pneumonia, organ system failure, and shock. Symptoms can progress rapidly, sometimes leading to death in 24-48 hours. The disease is easily spread by direct contact or by droplets of respiratory secretions (coughing, sneezing, kissing, and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation). Contact among members of the same household greatly increases the risk of infection.

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Houston Area Immunization Partnership Announces Campaign to Highlight New Vaccines-Add 1 of 1

Whooping cough, or pertussis, is a highly communicable bacterial disease characterized by forceful coughing, followed by vomiting. It's named after the "whoop" sound children often make when trying to breathe during a severe coughing spell. Whooping cough is caused by the bacterium *Bordetella Pertussis*, which is found in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. The disease spreads through close contact when an infected person talks, sneezes or coughs. Infants to six months that have not completed their primary vaccine series to protect them from whooping cough are at highest risk for apnea, pneumonia, seizures, encephalopathy, and death. Key facts about whooping cough:

- Pre-teens and teens get whooping cough more often than any other age group except infants younger than one year, and are often the source of infant infections.
- Most adolescents who get whooping cough are ill for several weeks and visit several physicians before they are diagnosed.
- 90% of unvaccinated children living with someone with whooping cough will also get the disease.

Chickenpox is a viral infection of the skin and sometimes of internal organs, caused by the Varicella Zoster virus. Symptoms vary from an itchy rash to swelling of the brain, and even pneumonia. The skin rash is blister-like lesions covering the body, but usually more concentrated on the face and scalp. Most infected individuals have fever which develops just before or when the rash appears. Those who have been vaccinated against the disease may get a milder case of illness, with less severe rash, and mild or no fever. Chickenpox is highly contagious, and is also spread by coughing and sneezing, and through direct contact. Secondary bacterial infections of open skin sores can lead to hospitalization and death.

"As parents, we should make the choice to prevent what's preventable by making sure all our children are up-to-date on their vaccines, regardless of age." said Dragsbaek.

Houston Area Immunization Partnership Adolescent Immunization Campaign

- Press Conference to launch Community Awareness Campaign – *April 22*
- "Immunize the Freaks of Nature", a theatrical production by Interactive Theater to educate middle school students about immunization. Special performances at select Health Fairs during the summer and at middle schools this fall. – *Premieres April 22*
- PSAs airing on television and radio – *Ongoing*
- Information available for parents, providers and school nurses at www.immunizehouston.org
- Educational materials for distribution at health fairs, schools and community events

About the Houston Area Immunization Partnership

Houston Area Immunization Partnership is a non-profit organization that aims to eradicate vaccine preventable diseases by developing and coordinating our community's resources through public and private partnerships. The primary focus areas are education, advocacy and public policy, and support of immunization information systems. For more information, visit www.immunizehouston.org

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