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Dr. D



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Health Tip: Childhood Immunization Update

In the history of modern medicine, few advancements have been as important as the development of immunizations for infectious diseases. While controversy surrounding certain vaccines exists, such as the flu shot "giving" you the flu or pertussis vaccine causing autism, the significance of these concerns pales in comparison to the amount of suffering and the number of deaths that immunizations have prevented. Childhood is the period of life in which many of the important vaccinations are received. Over the past few years, changes and additions to the standard childhood immunization protocols have been made by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices of the Centers for Disease Control. Let's look at some of these new recommendations and learn why they're important for your children.

Influenza ("Flu") Vaccination Influenza is not just an adult disease. More healthy children currently contract the flu than ever before, which has created a huge burden on the medical system to provide influenza-related care. Additionally, it is felt that by decreasing the number of cases of influenza in children, household contacts can be spared the illness. Previously, it was recommended that only children from 6 months to 5 years of age receive the influenza vaccine. The new recommendation expands the recommended ages for annual influenza vaccination to include all children from 6 months through 18 years of age. It is hoped that this vaccination policy will begin during the 2009 - 2010 influenza season.



Human papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination This one is a bit more controversial. The Centers for Disease Control has recommended that all 11

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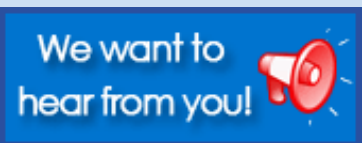
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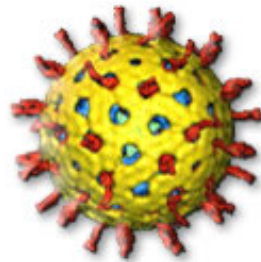
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and 12 year old girls receive this vaccine. Since HPV is considered to be a venereal disease, there has been some resistance on the part of parents to condone the administration of this vaccine to their daughters. The primary reason, however, for recommending its use is that this vaccine targets HPV types that cause up to 70% of all cervical cancers and about 90% of genital warts. The age range that the vaccination is recommended helps insure that girls receive

HPV vaccine before they become sexually active and exposed to the virus. This is a unique vaccine in that it is capable of preventing a very common type of infection as well as a serious form of cancer. For more on this see HPV Vaccine - Questions & Answers at the CDC website.

Rotavirus Vaccine (RotaTeq, Rotarix)



Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhea among children, resulting in more than 400,000 doctor visits, approximately 55,000 hospitalizations and between 20 and 60 deaths each year in the United States. Rotavirus infections are characterized by vomiting, watery diarrhea for up to a week, fever and abdominal pain. In most cases, the disease is self-limited, but based on the degree of suffering caused by this virus; it would be highly desirable to have a vaccine to prevent rotavirus

infections. The first rotavirus vaccine, RotaShield, was voluntarily withdrawn from the U.S. market in 1999 because of an increased risk of developing intussusception, which can lead to potentially life-threatening intestinal blockage. A newer product, RotaTeq has been used since 2006 with very few complications. Despite the recommendation from the CDC that all children receive this immunization, clinicians have been slow to offer it to their patients. Now, two manufacturers are producing the rotavirus vaccine. In April of this year, the FDA approved a new rotavirus vaccine called Rotarix. It is recommended that either vaccine be give in 3 separate injections, ideally at 2, 4 and 6 months of age.

Along with these additions to the standard immunization protocol, the time-tested immunizations such as polio, tetanus, measles and hepatitis continue to be recommended also. No doubt controversy regarding the use of vaccines will persist. Anytime adverse effects result from the administration of a medication or vaccine to a healthy child, it begs the question of their necessity and of their safety in other children. Nevertheless, there have been millions of young lives saved and illnesses avoided through the use of vaccines. When weighing the benefits and burdens of immunizations, it is best to look at their long-term track record in populations of people rather than to dwell on isolated incidents of adverse effects.

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