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Get your vaccines updated now to protect against various diseases

As part of the August Immunization Awareness Month campaign, local health officials remind residents to catch up on their vaccinations as the community prepares for the upcoming flu season and as students return to school and college.

Vaccines offer safe and effective protection against pertussis or whooping cough, hepatitis, chickenpox, pneumonia and many other vaccine-preventable diseases. Health officials say that although these diseases still exist, they are less common because vaccines are working.

“When people stay up-to-date on recommended vaccinations, our entire community benefits,” says Sarasota County Health Department Medical Director Dr. William Heymann. “Sarasota County experienced an outbreak of pertussis a few years ago due in part to the waning immunity against the disease in pre-teens. By ensuring that youths get a booster shot at age 11, we are able to reduce the likelihood of another outbreak. Whooping cough causes coughing that lasts for weeks, even months. Coughing spells can lead to breathing, eating and sleeping problems and, in serious cases, may result in hospitalization, pneumonia and even death.”

Because children are particularly vulnerable to infection, the majority of vaccines that protect against childhood diseases are needed during the first 5 to 6 years of life. Children should receive vaccines against diphtheria, influenza, tetanus, pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox, polio, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and others. Adolescents should receive vaccines to protect against flu, meningococcal disease, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and the Tdap vaccine, a booster against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis.

Parents are encouraged to check their children’s vaccination records since these vaccines must be up-to-date for them to enter Sarasota County schools on Aug. 23. Students who are leaving for college also may need proof of immunizations.

Vaccines recommended for adults include the following: influenza, zoster (shingles), pneumococcal disease, tetanus and diphtheria. In addition, vaccines against certain diseases are recommended for those traveling outside of the country. Health officials say that everyone over 6 months of age should get vaccinated against the flu. This

year's flu vaccine, which will be available in early fall, will include protection against the 2009 H1N1 (swine) flu virus.

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) immunization schedules](#) list the ages when each vaccine or series of shots is given. If children, adolescents or adults have missed any shots, consult the catch-up schedule and check with your doctor about getting back on track. Additionally, the CDC also recommends that all 11- and 12-year-old girls receive the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, which protects against the most common types of cervical cancer.

The Sarasota County Health Department, through the federally funded Vaccines for Children (VFC) program, offers free immunizations to children from families who lack health insurance or whose insurance does not pay for immunizations. No appointment is needed. A parent or legal guardian must be present. **Prior shot records are required.**

Foreign travel vaccines are also available for a fee, which includes a consultation with a registered nurse and administration of the needed vaccines. Those who are planning trips out of the country in places where vaccines may be needed are advised to contact the Sarasota County Health Department at least six weeks before their planned departure.

Sarasota County Health Department

Children's Immunization Clinic
2200 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota
Monday- Friday
Call 941-861-2784 for hours.

South County Family Health Center

South County Resource Center (just north of State College of Florida formerly Manatee Community College)
19501 W. Villages Parkway, Building B2
North Port, ([map](#))
(Formerly 7820 Tamiami Trail S., Venice - same location, new address)
Monday-Friday
Call 941-861-3338 for hours.

For more information, contact your health care provider or the Sarasota County Health Department at the numbers provided above, or visit the website at www.sarasotahealth.org.

Click on related links on the immunization page to find the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's immunization schedules for children, adolescents and adults, as well as recommended pre-teen vaccinations and foreign travel shot information.

Beginning in the fall, people can call the Flu Information Line at 941-861-2800 or visit www.sarasotahealth.org for a schedule of flu shot clinics. Touch-screen health kiosks also are available at local libraries for those who do not have access to a computer. The Sarasota County Call Center has a TDD line, 941-861-1833, available for those who are hearing-impaired.