



NEWS RELEASE

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IDPH Outlines Steps to Combat Measles During National Infant Immunization Week

Take action to make sure your child is fully immunized

SPRINGFIELD –This year marks the 25th anniversary of National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW). When the NIIW observance was established in 1994, the U.S. was in the midst of several outbreaks, the largest of which was among Illinois and Missouri residents. Decades of increased vaccinations led to the declaration of measles being eliminated in the U.S. in 2000; however, 25 years after the first NIIW, the country is once again seeing measles outbreaks. During NIIW April 27-May 4, 2019, Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director, Dr. Ngozi Ezike is asking parents to talk with a health care provider to ensure their children are fully immunized.

“Because of the success of vaccines in preventing disease, parents may not have heard of some of the serious diseases they prevent. Children can suffer serious illness and even death when exposed to diseases like measles, mumps, and pertussis,” said Dr. Ezike. “Although vaccines are among the most successful, safe, and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease and death, some people still chose not to be vaccinated. It is essential that you protect your child against serious illness by having them vaccinated before they are exposed to potentially life-threatening diseases.”

As of April 26, 2019, there have been more than 700 cases of measles in the U.S. this year, including 78 new cases identified last week. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this is the greatest number of cases reported in the U.S. since 1994 and since measles was eliminated in 2000.

Although Illinois data do not reflect the same trend, the U.S. is seeing an increase in the number of children younger than two years old who are receiving no vaccines. CDC’s data suggest that many of these parents do want to vaccinate their children, but they may not be able to get vaccines for them. They may face hurdles, like not having a health care professional nearby, not having time to get their children to a doctor, and/or thinking they cannot afford vaccines.

Public health officials are working with schools, community organizations, religious groups, parent organizations, and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to provide vaccinations. Steps will include, but are not limited to:

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- **Mobile Units:** IDPH will assist in providing mobile health units to neighborhoods with low vaccination rates to hold clinics and provide vaccinations.
- **Targeted Events:** IDPH will identify events with high parent and children attendance and support vaccination clinics at these events. These can include county fairs and neighborhood celebrations.
- **Faith Outreach:** IDPH will work with religious organizations to sponsor vaccination clinics after services, during vacation bible school, and near other religious gatherings.
- **Community Coordination:** IDPH will work with community health workers and parent educators to help set up appointment times for vaccinations, provide or arrange transportation, and assist parents in filling out the paperwork.
- **Public Education:** IDPH will work to combat misinformation about vaccines and increase education efforts through health events, marketing, and social media.

IDPH is currently working with local health departments across the state to meet and talk with school officials and health care providers in the community to learn about barriers that limit vaccination and identify additional opportunities to increase rates. Barriers already identified include:

- **Transportation:** Some parents do not have a way to get their children to clinics for vaccinations.
- **Time:** Health clinic hours may not fit with working parents' schedule.
- **Paperwork:** Vaccination requires the consent forms to be filled by the parent. Some parents may be overwhelmed by the paperwork and not fully understand how to fill it out.
- **Wait Times:** While local health departments and providers may offer special vaccination clinics before the beginning of the school year, the wait times can sometimes be more than an hour.

Additionally, IDPH continues to recruit and retain Vaccine for Children (VFC) health care providers. The Vaccines For Children (VFC) program is a federally funded program that provides vaccines at no cost for children who might not otherwise be vaccinated because of inability to pay. The VCF program helps children get their vaccines according to the recommended immunization schedule.

Through on-time [immunization](#), parent can protect infants and children from [14 vaccine-preventable diseases](#) before age two. While overall childhood [immunization rates remain high](#), unvaccinated children in the U.S. are at risk for contracting [diseases that some parents might consider diseases of the past](#).

In the 1950's, nearly every child developed measles, and unfortunately, some developed serious complications including death from this serious disease. Today, many practicing physicians have never seen a case of measles due to the effectiveness of the vaccine. However, although rare in the U.S., they are still commonly transmitted in many parts of the world and brought into the country by unvaccinated individuals, putting other unvaccinated people at risk.

More information about the [VFC program](#) and [immunizations](#) can be found on the IDPH website.

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