

Richard Whitley, M.S.
Administrator

Mary Guinan, M.D., PhD
State Health Officer



Contact Name: Martha Framsted, PIO
Phone Number: 775.684.4014
Release Date: September 5, 2008
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NEVADA STATE HEALTH DIVISION

NEWS RELEASE

Nevada Sees Slight Improvement in Childhood Immunization Rates ***Much more work needed to improve the state's immunization rates***

Carson City – The Nevada State Health Division has announced that Nevada's childhood immunization rate showed a 3.6 percent improvement between 2006 and 2007, according to the recent National Immunization Survey (NIS). Although Nevada continues to rank poorly in terms of the percentage of children being immunized, the modest improvement coupled with expanding programs to increase this rate is encouraging.

The increase involves the following childhood vaccination series for children two months-36 months of age: four doses of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine (DTaP); three doses of polio vaccine; one or more doses of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR); three doses of Haemophilus influenza type b vaccine (Hib); three doses of hepatitis B vaccine; and one or more doses of varicella or chickenpox vaccine (4:3:1:3:3:1)

Additionally, according to the 2007 National Immunization Survey (NIS), Nevada ranks as the 11th highest state when looking at vaccination coverage for Hepatitis B vaccination among children one-three days old.

The State Health Division is in the process of improving its immunization registry, WEB IZ, which nationally has proven as an excellent vehicle for improving immunization percentages. The Immunization Coalition recently hired a staff person dedicated to Clark County, where the greatest number of uninsured children reside. This individual is responsible for WEB IZ training and technical assistance. Further, the State Health Division is expanding its training program and providing technical assistance to providers statewide, and upgrading the WEB IZ system to make it more user-friendly.

“By enhancing our WEB IZ system, better data will be available in order to determine where state efforts need to be targeted in order to ensure children are receiving their vaccinations according to the recommended timeline,” said Dr. Mary Guinan, State Health Officer. “Our goal is to better protect our most vulnerable population, our children, by increasing our immunization rates statewide against vaccine preventable diseases.”



Richard Whitley, Administrator

4150 Technology Way, Suite 300 Carson City, Nevada 89706
Phone (775) 684-4200, Fax (775) 684-4211
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In addition, Nevada Revised Statute 439.265 (signed into law June 2007) requires the State Board of Health to adopt regulations regarding establishment and operation of a statewide immunization information system, and requires providers to report all immunizations given to children after July 1, 2009.

The state's Immunization Program is also reviewing other state programs that are achieving high immunization rates to determine what has proven successful and what ideas can be utilized in Nevada.

Historically, Nevada has lagged behind the national immunization rate for children aged two (2) months to 36 months. There are many reasons that may contribute to this problem:

- No "home" base for health care, such as a primary care pediatrician or clinic.
- Limited access to health care or lack of insurance.
- Not enough Vaccine for Children providers in the community.
- Language or cultural barriers.
- Poor immunization records.
- Transient population.

Another challenge facing the state is a recent 22 percent reduction in funding from a federal entitlement program which provides vaccines to states. The federal reduction, coupled with an increase in the number of federally recommended vaccinations, forced the State Health Division to discontinue its practice of providing vaccines to all Nevada children younger than 18.

In response, the State Health Division made the hard decision to become a Vaccine for Children (VFC) program only. Currently, Nevada is considered a Universal-Select program, which provides some of the recommended vaccinations to all children. Children who are uninsured, underinsured (have health insurance, but the policy does not cover vaccinations), eligible for Medicaid, Native American or Alaska Native, will continue to receive free vaccine through the state's Vaccines For Children program. However, health insurance companies will begin being billed for children covered by health care plans as January 1, 2009.

When reviewing the states that rank the highest in immunization rates, the vaccine supply policy for each of these states varies. For instance, the highest ranked state, Maryland, has the VFC and Underinsured policy, while the fifth ranked state, Nebraska, is VFC only (see attachment for the entire table). This indicates that the vaccine supply policy does not directly correlate to the immunization rates for each state.

"While our goal is to have all children vaccinated, Nevada has not seen an increase in vaccine preventable diseases, which may indicate that our immunization rate is more a reflection of needing better record keeping and information sharing," said Dr. Ihsan Azzam, State Epidemiologist.

For more information, contact the Immunization Program at 775-684-5900; Jo Malay, Acting Program Manager, 775-684-5934; Eric Pennington, Vaccine/Fiscal Manager at 775-684-5901; or Tami Chartraw, Web IZ Manager at 775-684-4032.

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