



News Release

For immediate release
May 18, 2020

Vaccinations Rates Drop During COVID-19

Billings, MT – Do you or your child need to catch up on routine vaccines?

Fewer U.S. children have been receiving recommended immunizations against preventable diseases since the COVID-19 pandemic started, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The nation's largest childhood vaccine program has seen a decrease in participation for children younger than 24 months and an even larger decrease in utilization for older children, according to the CDC.

Healthcare providers in Yellowstone County also are seeing a drop in routine vaccinations. The Unified Health Command of Yellowstone County (Billings Clinic, RiverStone Health, St. Vincent Healthcare, and Yellowstone County Disaster and Emergency Services) urges parents to make sure children are getting their childhood immunizations on time according to their immunization schedule. Adults also need to pay close attention to what vaccines they need to stay protected.

“One thing the COVID pandemic has taught us, is how much we rely on the protection immunizations give to a population. Clinics all over Montana are making changes so we can safely see kids and give vaccines, making the risk of bringing your child in to get their immunizations very low,” said Dr. Kathryn Lysinger, Billings Clinic pediatrician. “The consequences of getting a vaccine-preventable disease, however, can be devastating.”

“As we’ve seen with recent outbreaks of measles, a drop in immunization rates could mean resurgence of illnesses that have been nearly eradicated,” said Dr. Chris Baumert, family medicine physician with RiverStone Health. “This has the potential to have significant consequences for the health of our public when compounded with the risks of COVID-19.”

Local healthcare organizations are taking precautions to keep patients safe when they come in for vaccines that will protect them from preventable diseases, such as measles and hepatitis. Precautions include:

- Temperature checks for fever and screening for respiratory symptoms.
- Appropriate masking.
- Separation of well and sick children.
- COVID-19 testing when necessary for procedures.

CDC reminds parents:

- Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases can and do still happen in communities across the United States.
- The CDC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration take many steps to make sure vaccines are very safe.
- Vaccines give you the power to protect your children from getting sick.
- You can make sure your baby is born with protection by getting vaccinated when you are pregnant.

With the easing of stay-at-home orders, children and adults may be at higher risks for preventable diseases if they haven't been vaccinated as recommended. Make sure your child is immunized on time.

“Making sure children are as up to date as possible on their immunizations is a powerful way parents can keep them healthy,” said Dr. Stephanie Thomas, St. Vincent Healthcare primary care physician. “By all means, if children have symptoms of an illness, vaccines can wait a few weeks, but staying on track as much as possible is recommended. The well child appointments as a whole, especially for children under four years of age, are really important to make sure their growth and development are staying on track as well.”

Vaccination schedules by age can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/vaccines-age.html>

To arrange for a Zoom or phone follow-up interview with Dr. Dr. Kathryn Lysinger, Billings Clinic pediatrician, before 1 p.m. today, please contact Arianne Snyder, with Billings Clinic at office: 406-657-4645; mobile: 406-794-1994.

