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Protect them, immunize them...

You do so much to make sure your children and adolescents are safe. Remember, vaccinations are another important way to keep them healthy and protected. The 14th annual National Infant Immunization Week, **April 19-26** has been set aside to remind parents that keeping children safe and healthy includes protecting them from 15 serious diseases. Public health officials advise parents to talk with their child's health care provider or call the Sarasota County Health Department about the vaccines that their baby or child may need. Serious diseases may be prevented by following the age guidelines and getting infants, young children and adolescents vaccinated on time.

Vaccines are one of public health's greatest success stories because they prevent serious disease and death. "Because of this success, many of parents think diseases like polio, whooping cough, and measles no longer exist...but they do," says Dr. Kieran Smart, medical director for the Sarasota County Health Department. According to the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, 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 and even death. Whooping cough is on the rise in all age groups. "Although these vaccine-preventable diseases still exist, they are less common because vaccines are working," says Dr. Smart. He adds that "while most infants and toddlers have received all recommended vaccines by age two, many adolescents and adults are under-immunized leaving the potential for outbreaks of disease, and missing opportunities to protect them from diseases such as Hepatitis B, influenza, and pneumococcal disease."

Before vaccines became readily available, millions of children worldwide became infected with contagious diseases often resulting in lifelong illness and sometimes death. Immunizations protect children and adolescents against these contagious, preventable and sometimes deadly diseases. To continue this protection, we need maximum immunization coverage in our community. The consequences of not doing so would be a worldwide increase in preventable disease.

Vaccines will continue to work only as long as we immunize our children. The ongoing problems with a measles outbreak in California illustrate the consequences when we fail to do so. See www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm57e222a1.htm

There has been controversy about serious consequences of immunizations. However, public health officials say the evidence does not support the contention that the risk outweighs the benefits. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) works closely with public health agencies and private partners to maximize immunization coverage while monitoring the safety of vaccines so this public health success story can be maintained and expanded.

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Public health officials urge parents to seek out reputable and reliable, evidenced based information sources so they can make educated decisions about their family’s health.

Further Information on immunizations:

Free children’s immunizations at Sarasota County Health Department (SCHD)	www.sarasotahealth.org/immunizations.htm
SCHD adult travel immunization clinic	www.cdc.gov/travel/content/Vaccinations.aspx
Florida Immunization schedule	www.immunizeflorida.org/
American Pediatric Association	www.cispimmunize.org/
CDC	www2a.cdc.gov/nip/kidstuff/newscheduler_le/
Medical and vaccine information	www.pubmed.gov/
World Health Organization	www.who.int/immunization/en/

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