

Immunization Updates

For sixth grade parents:

Don't forget to have your child immunized with a Tdap vaccine prior to the 2013 school year. This 7th grade requirement has been in place the last several years due to a rise in Pertussis cases across the nation (see below). Please make sure to get the documentation to the school before the start of next school year. *By law, we are to exclude any student who is not in compliance with immunizations after the 15th day of the school year.* You can bring this into the elementary school prior to the end of the school year or send the documentation directly to the Athens Middle School at 51-55 West State St over the summer. The doctor's office or clinic does not automatically send this to the school. If you think your child has already had the booster dose, please make sure we have actually received that update. Please call 740-797-4544 ext 226 with any questions you may have. You can also email me at jstock@athenscity.k12.oh.us.

Update on Pertussis

This past school year, we have had 4 known cases of Pertussis (whooping cough) amongst our Athens City School students. While, whooping cough can happen to someone who has been vaccinated, it is generally less severe, though still contagious. Infants and children who have only been partially vaccinated are most vulnerable and can become critically ill. In the first half of the 20th century, Whooping Cough was the leading cause of childhood illness and death. Our students K-6th are considered to be covered by immunizations required for school entry for kindergarten. Our present 7-9th graders have had a booster dose, required for entry to 7th grade the past few years.

In a 2005 study, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) found that only 2.1% of adults 18-64 years old are immunized against Pertussis. **Subsequently, they have recommended that adolescents and adults up to 65 years old get a one-time booster dose to protect those most vulnerable.** Boostrix or Adacel (Tdap) vaccine has been approved for this age. I understand that it is often difficult deciding what warrants a trip to the doctor. A persistent bark-like cough that last several weeks should be checked by a doctor. With the rise of whooping cough in our community and across the nation, and the lack of coverage, it is a concern for our most vulnerable.

Parents opting out of exemptions

The state of Ohio does allow for a parent to write a **letter of exemption** from immunizations due to medical, religious or philosophical reasons. The list of parents opting out of vaccines has grown longer over the years and the concept of herd immunity becomes less applicable when there are increasing gaps in coverage. A study published in Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine (Jan, 2010) noted a 23 fold increased risk for Whooping Cough in children not vaccinated against Pertussis.

The website [http:// www.vaccinesafety.edu/cc-mmr.htm](http://www.vaccinesafety.edu/cc-mmr.htm) out of John Hopkins School of Public Health has some interesting articles about vaccine safety versus risk. We know that after an article appeared in the Lancet back in 1998, linking the MMR vaccine to autism vaccines, vaccine coverage dropped significantly and parents felt distrust. What

many do not know is that the Lancet later retracted this article after it was found that the lead researcher engaged in unethical conduct related to that research. Numerous peer-reviewed articles have since underlined the lack of connection between the MMR and Autism. Another excellent site is: [http:// www.cdc.gov/feature/pertussis](http://www.cdc.gov/feature/pertussis).

On a recent review of our immunization records by the Ohio Department of Health, I was asked to require an updated exemption letter EVERY YEAR from parents choosing to opt out. While we are not ready to make this a policy, it would be helpful for tracking where we are at with vaccine coverage since many parents signing exemption letters are actually immunizing, but on an alternate schedule.

Questions: School Nurse, Janalee Stock: jstock@athenscity.k12.oh.us,
or Health Department: 592-4431