

### **Keep Up the Progress on Childhood Immunization**

Since joining the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as director last year, I have been extremely concerned about the unacceptably low levels of immunization among America's preschool children. Immunization may be our most cost effective way to prevent disease.

For example, we estimate that for every dollar spent on the measles-mumps-rubella vaccine, \$21 is saved in costs to society. Despite this, more than a million of our youngest children have not received all the immunizations they need. That is why the President launched the Childhood Immunization Initiative, which is managed by CDC.

The Childhood Immunization Initiative has been launched to make sure that children do not become sick or die from vaccine-preventable diseases. Specific and urgent goals to be accomplished are

- to reduce most diseases preventable by childhood vaccination to zero,
- to increase vaccination levels for 2-year-old children to at least 90 percent for the initial and most critical doses in the vaccine series and 70 percent for a more recent vaccine—hepatitis B, and
- to build a vaccine delivery system to maintain these achievements in the United States.

Since 1993, CDC has been responsible for providing vaccine, management, technical assistance, information, epidemiology, assessment, and other national immunization services. These efforts have been targeted to State and local health departments and other partners.

A major component of this Initiative is the Vaccines for Children Program, which provides federally purchased vaccine free to children who are Medicaid-eligible, uninsured, or Native American. In addition, children served by federally qualified health centers or rural health clinics are eligible if their health insurance does not cover immunization. The

Program is intended to remove cost as a barrier to immunization by purchasing vaccines and making them widely available.

CDC also has launched a national outreach and community involvement effort to alert parents to the need for up-to-date immunizations, especially for infants and preschoolers. Full protection requires approximately five visits to the physician for immunizations within the baby's first 2 years of life. Every effort is being made at the State and local level to ensure that the vaccine purchased under the Vaccines for Children Program is widely accessible.

In summary, CDC is using the law passed by Congress to create a system that will achieve the objective of getting more children vaccinated before they are exposed to very serious disease. We must safeguard the health of the nation's children. We need to work together to increase immunizations for those younger than age 2.

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