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## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **IMMUNIZATION: IT'S A FAMILY AFFAIR!**

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**April 27, 2009 (OTTAWA, ON) –**

Immunization is not just for kids – **It's a Family Affair!** National Immunization Awareness Week in Canada is April 25 to May 2, 2009. Everyone – not just parents of small children – is encouraged to learn more about how to protect themselves against vaccine-preventable disease.

The *Canadian Immunization Guide* recommends immunization beginning at 2 months of age and continuing through all stages of life. "Following a standard schedule ensures that the maximal achievable protection is achieved." (*CIG*, p. 93)

"It is critically important that parents make sure their children receive all doses of the recommended vaccines. Otherwise they are at risk of some very serious diseases," says Dr. Bonnie Henry, Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion (CCIAP). "Infants are particularly vulnerable to many diseases that vaccines prevent since they have not yet developed immunity to the bacteria and viruses that cause them. Immunization triggers their immune systems to be prepared to protect them from these serious diseases."

Recent outbreaks of mumps and measles in Canada have resulted in public health officials in some parts of the country recommending catch-up programs to ensure that people born since 1970 are adequately immunized.

Although receiving immunizations during childhood is critical, some vaccines will not provide lifelong immunity against some diseases such as tetanus (lockjaw) and diphtheria. Helper, or booster, shots are required to maintain immunity. A booster dose is recommended every ten years.

Adults who were not adequately immunized as children may be at risk of infection from other vaccine-preventable diseases. This is one of several good reasons for continuing to ensure your immunization record is up to date. "Achieving target immunization rates benefits both individuals and communities. As more individuals are protected, the more we reduce the consequences of these diseases on everyone in our community and on our health care system," confirms Dr. Susan Bowles, Vice Chair of the CCIAP.

The reasons for staying on schedule with your immunization are all around you – your immediate and extended family, friends, co-workers, clients, and your community. You can be part of the success of immunization in Canada!

## **Backgrounder**

Canada's national immunization coverage rates are not optimal, leaving those who are not immunized vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, mumps and whooping cough (pertussis). Canadian parents are urged to talk to their doctor, nurse, pharmacist or local public health office about ensuring that they and their children are fully immunized and protected.

To prevent and control vaccine-preventable diseases, immunization coverage rates should generally be well over 90%. The World Health Organization states that all countries should achieve a 90% national immunization coverage rate by 2010.<sup>1</sup>

A 2006 Government of Canada report<sup>2</sup> set the 2010 target immunization coverage rate for two-year-olds at:

- 95% for pertussis (whooping cough);
- 85% for varicella (chicken pox);
- 97% for rubella (German measles);
- 90% for pneumococcal conjugate; and
- 97% meningococcal C conjugate vaccines.

Yet, a sampling of results from the National Immunization Coverage Survey<sup>3</sup> show coverage rates for two-year-olds who have received all the recommended vaccine doses at only:

- 74% for pertussis (whooping cough);
- 61% for diphtheria, tetanus, polio, Hib, measles, mumps, and rubella.

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health intervention. Immunization is the single most cost-effective health investment, making it a cornerstone in the effort to promote health.

**NOTE: Local immunization coverage rates vary across Canada. For local information about immunization recommendations and coverage rates, please contact your local public health office. Links to local public health offices are listed on CCIAP's web site <http://immunize.ca/en/publications-resources/links.aspx> .**

### **For national information, contact:**

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### **About the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion**

The Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion is a coalition of 28 national organizations. Its mission is to contribute to the control, elimination, and eradication of vaccine-preventable diseases in Canada by increasing awareness of the benefits and risks of immunization for all ages via education, promotion, advocacy and media relations.

### **National Immunization Awareness Week**

National Immunization Awareness Week, April 25-May 2, 2009, reminds us of the importance of immunization to preserve the good health of our children, families and communities. Look for special events in your area, organized by your local public health office, clinic, hospital, pharmacy or workplace. Immunization experts will be available in all parts of Canada to comment on our most effective tool to prevent disease – vaccines!

National Immunization Awareness Week in Canada coincides with Vaccination Week in the Americas organized by the Pan American Health Organization [www.paho.org](http://www.paho.org) . European Immunization Week this year took place from April 20-26 [http://www.euro.who.int/vaccine/eiw/20081205\\_33](http://www.euro.who.int/vaccine/eiw/20081205_33) .

### **Links**

1. *Global Immunization Vision and Strategy 2006-2015*, published by the World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/immunization/givs/en/index.html>
2. Final Report of Outcomes from the *National Consensus Conference for Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in Canada*, published by the Public Health Agency of Canada <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/08vol34/34s2/index-eng.php>
3. Canadian National Report on Immunization 2006 [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/06vol32/32s3/2vaccine\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/06vol32/32s3/2vaccine_e.html)