



Partnering to Prevent Disease, Promote Health and Reduce Costs

Open Letter to Oregonians Supporting the Importance of Immunizations

March 3, 2010

Vaccines Save Lives

The Oregon Partnership to Immunize Children (OPIC) supports immunizations as the safest, most effective way to control and eradicate vaccine-preventable diseases in Oregon and across the globe. Thanks to vaccinations, we have not seen or experienced many of the infectious diseases that gripped past generations; however, we are not immune to disease outbreaks in our state.

Consider this: whooping cough (pertussis) is the only reported vaccine-preventable disease that has increased in incidence (e.g., number of new cases) in the United States in the last 20 years. During 2004, Oregon's reported incidence was about twice the national average.¹ Through timely vaccination, we can protect those who are too young to be vaccinated, and those who cannot be vaccinated due to immune-deficiency issues. In other words, vaccinating our families according to the CDC's recommended immunization schedules not only protects our loved ones, but also our communities.

Infectious diseases pose a real threat to personal and public health. And they can be just a plane ride away. Those who are not vaccinated leave not only themselves, but others vulnerable to dangerous diseases. Vaccines are the most effective option for preventing and stopping the spread of infectious diseases.

¹ <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/cdsummary/2005/ohd5417.pdf>

- In Oregon, 5% of kindergartners have an exemption for one or more vaccines. In some communities, this rate is much higher, leaving children at greater risk for life-threatening disease than those in neighboring towns and cities. For example, in Ashland, nearly 25% of kindergartners have exemptions for some or all of their vaccines, a rate five times the rest of the state.²
- Whooping cough rates have increased dramatically over the past thirty years, from a low of 1,000 cases to over 10,000 in 2008. Children who are not immunized against whooping cough have been shown to be 23 times more likely to contract the disease³.
- Immunization has nearly eliminated *Haemophilus influenzae* type b. Before the vaccine became available, 20,000 cases of the disease were reported and nearly 600 died each year in the United States. Unfortunately, cases of this deadly disease are resurfacing in the United States due to lower vaccination rates³.
- Influenza continues to take the lives of more than 36,000 Americans each year³. The 2009 H1N1 flu outbreak alone resulted in 9,820 deaths and approximately 213,000 hospitalizations⁴. This can be prevented only through annual vaccination against this deadly disease.

Together, we can protect ourselves and each other from potentially deadly diseases. Please be sure you and your loved ones are immunized on time, every time. For more information about vaccines and immunization, talk to your health care provider, or local health department.

For additional information about the Oregon Partnership to Immunize Children, contact:
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² Oregon Immunization Program, unpublished data, 2009

³ http://www.vaccinateyourbaby.org/pdfs/20090817_open_letter.pdf

⁴ http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/estimates/April_November_14.htm