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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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State to recognize National Public Health Week with a series of stories

Day 3: April 4 — Preventing the spread of disease through immunization

ANCHORAGE — The Alaska Division of Public Health is recognizing National Public Health Week with a series of stories centered on the week's theme: A Healthier America Begins Today.

Each day, Monday through Friday, we will focus on a different aspect of health:

- Monday, April 2 — Obesity prevention through active living and healthy eating
- Tuesday, April 3 — Reducing the impact of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Wednesday, April 4 — Preventing communicable diseases through immunization
- Thursday, April 5 — Preventing sexually transmitted diseases
- Friday, April 6 — Mental and emotional well-being

Sometimes the smallest change can make the biggest difference. Small changes in diet and exercise, tobacco use, immunization practices and sexual conduct can help people stay healthy. Yet each year, nearly 1 million Americans die from diseases that could have been prevented.

Vaccines have saved millions of lives and prevented hundreds of millions of cases of disease since their introduction. In the first decade of the 21st century, the use of measles, polio, and diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccines prevented an estimated 2.5 million deaths each year among children under age 5. Expanded coverage with measles vaccine resulted in a 78-percent decline in measles mortality from 2000 to 2008, averting an estimated 12.7 million deaths.

Due to the success of vaccination programs, most parents have not witnessed the devastating effects of now-preventable diseases, yet they still exist. Measles, for example, infects nearly 23 million people around the world each year and kills about 480,000 of them. In 2010, more than 9,000 cases of pertussis (whooping cough) were reported throughout California, the most since 1947. Ten infants died. Diseases such as hepatitis, whooping cough and diphtheria can still infect children in the U.S. who are not immunized on time.

“Vaccine-preventable diseases are still present in Alaska,” said Gerri Yett, state immunization program manager. “Children need to be protected as soon as possible by on-time, every-time vaccination.”

Babies need 80 percent of their immunizations by the time they’re 2, a time when they are most vulnerable to preventable diseases. Adolescents and adults also need immunizations to both keep themselves healthy and to protect infants who may not yet be fully protected.

In 2010, Alaska ranked 42nd among all states for completion of the standard series of vaccines.

“We can do better. All of us have a responsibility to do what we can to prevent disease,” Yett said. “By protecting ourselves and our loved ones we protect others. Immunization works. Every day, children all over Alaska run and play because they don’t have polio, pertussis or diphtheria — what could be better than that?”

For a full schedule of childhood vaccines go to:
<http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/id/iz/schedules/schedule.pdf>

For more information on childhood vaccines go to:
[Every Child By Two](#)

April 5 — Preventing the spread of STDs

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