



ParentPages

SHOTSMARTS FROM IMMUNIZE GEORGIA

Vaccine Preventable Diseases do Happen in Georgia

Why do we give vaccines (shots)? Your young children should be up-to-date on shots, but you and your teenager also need to be up-to-date in order to protect the whole family. Despite efforts to fight vaccine preventable diseases, they can occur in Georgia. Here are a few examples of recent vaccine preventable disease outbreaks in Georgia that highlight the fact that we all need to be prepared.



Pertussis (whooping cough) outbreak in a church community

Pertussis is on the rise and can be hard to recognize because adolescent and adult symptoms may look like the common cold.

Pertussis spreads through coughing and sneezing. While most children receive pertussis shots during early childhood, the protection from these shots does not last a lifetime, and a booster dose (Tdap) is needed. Adults and adolescents who do not receive a booster dose can spread pertussis to infants who have not had their shots, or have only received a few shots and may not be fully protected. Infants can and do die from pertussis.

In the fall of 2006, a 10-month-old Georgia baby tested positive for pertussis. The baby's grandfather, grandmother and mother had a cough illness several days before the baby got sick. The family was active in their church and several church members reported a cough illness in the previous weeks, too. Out of 200 church members, 31 persons ranging from 2 months to 55 years of age were found to

possibly have pertussis. In this case, the infant was not up-to-date on his shots and got pertussis from the sick family members. In fact, a number of children at the church were not up-to-date with their shots or had never received any shots, which may have led to the spread of pertussis in the church community.

Take action against pertussis

Talk with your doctor about getting the pertussis shot (Tdap) to protect you and your family. If you have a cough that lasts more than a week, talk to your doctor about pertussis and avoid contact with infants and pregnant women. If your doctor suspects pertussis, he/she will prescribe antibiotics to treat the ill person and everyone else in your family should take antibiotics to prevent spread of the disease.

Measles at an International Science Fair

Measles is a very contagious disease that causes a high fever and rash. In some cases, measles can also cause swelling of the brain and pneumonia. Measles is spread by direct contact with infected people or saliva (through coughing, sneezing, talking, sharing utensils or drinking cups, etc.). Once someone has been exposed to measles, however, it can take from one-and-a-half weeks up to three weeks for symptoms to appear.

Last May, a high school student with measles traveled from India to Albuquerque, New Mexico for an annual international science fair attended by 1,500 students grades K-12 from the U.S. (including Georgia) and 51 other countries. In route, the child made multiple flight connections including one at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. The student was diagnosed with measles after arriving in New Mexico and attending the fair, but she was infectious for several days during her travel from India.

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Officials at the health department in New Mexico quickly determined that other people may have been exposed to measles on the flights, at the science fair and various hotels, and at a large retail store in Albuquerque. To try to reduce any possibility of spread, the New Mexico Health Department provided measles vaccine for certain fair attendees and the general public. Public Health officials in other states continued follow-up with fair attendees when they arrived in their home states. No other measles cases were linked to this outbreak.

Take action against Measles

The best way to protect yourself and your family against measles is to get vaccinated. If you will be traveling outside of the country, it is also very important to make sure you and your family are up-to-date on all required shots.

Hepatitis B in teenagers

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that can cause liver damage, cancer or death. It spreads from person to person through infected blood or sexual contact. Each year, many cases of hepatitis B in Georgia could be prevented by receiving the series of three shots to protect against this serious disease.

A 15-year-old male was born in Georgia and had been attending school in one county, but when the family moved to a county nearby, he changed schools. While both school systems may have checked his shot record, due to his age, hepatitis B vaccine was not required for school entry. In 2006, he went to see his doctor with symptoms of nausea, vomiting and loss of appetite. Blood tests showed acute (new) hepatitis B infection. Three other teenagers in Georgia, ages 15, 16 and 17, were diagnosed with acute hepatitis B infections in 2006. None had been vaccinated against this disease.

Take action against hepatitis B

A series of three shots of hepatitis B vaccine is required for all students entering schools or childcare facilities in Georgia. Because this requirement only applied to newly enrolled students when it was implemented in 1997, there are many older adolescents and young adults in Georgia who never received their shots for hepatitis B and are not protected. Check with your child's doctor to see if he/she needs to receive the series of three hepatitis B shots. In addition, if someone in your household has hepatitis B, it is recommended that others in the home receive the series of three shots. ■

