



BERRIEN COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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For Immediate Release

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Berrien County Health Department Encouraging Childhood Vaccines, Raising Awareness of Importance and Availability

Benton Harbor, Michigan, June 6, 2023 - As nationwide childhood vaccination rates drop for the second year in a row, the Berrien County Health Department is raising awareness of the importance and availability of childhood vaccines.

During the pandemic, routine health care visits, including childhood vaccinations, dropped as many people deferred appointments to limit their risk of being exposed to COVID-19 and getting sick. However, even as the severity of the pandemic has decreased, the number of children entering kindergarten with all required vaccinations, such as for measles, mumps and rubella, continues to drop.

At the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, 93% of K-12 students in the U.S. had all required vaccines, down from 95% at the start of the 2019-20 school year prior to the pandemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends vaccination rates be at least 95% to achieve herd immunity.

In Berrien County, 92.4% of K-12 students had all required vaccinations as of March 31 of this year.

The downtrend of vaccinations is also true for children younger than school age. For children aged 24-36 months, the Health Department has witnessed fluctuation and a slight decrease in vaccines over the last three years.

“We know there are a variety of reasons someone may be hesitant to get their child vaccinated,” Berrien County Health Officer Guy Miller said. “We know parents and caregivers are receiving information - and misinformation - about vaccines from many different sources.

“Vaccines have proven time and time again to be the most effective way to protect individuals from devastating diseases. The Berrien County Health Department and your primary care provider are here to help give you accurate, reliable information about vaccines so you can make the best decision for your child.”

The CDC provides guidance on [recommended vaccines](#) for various age groups. In Michigan, vaccines required for school entry include:

- Diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis
- Polio
- Measles, mumps and rubella
- Hepatitis B
- Varicella (Chickenpox)

Many providers have reported that while initial vaccinations for young children were high during the pandemic, there has been a drop-off in booster doses and additional vaccines as children get older.

“Though the pandemic is over, it is essential for children to stay up to date on all recommended vaccines and boosters to help them stay healthy,” said Dr. Rex Cabaltica, BCHD’s medical director. “Our youngest community members are some of the most vulnerable when it comes to vaccine-preventable conditions such as polio, measles and pertussis - and vaccines are proven to help reduce the risk of illness.”

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to connect with their primary care provider or the Health Department to discuss vaccinations for their dependents.

To find a list of vaccinations available through the BCHD, visit bit.ly/BCHDImmunizations. To schedule an appointment, call 269.927.5638.

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