

Pointers For Parents

Chickenpox Alert: An Estimated Three Million Children Head to School Unvaccinated, Risking Serious Complications

(NAPSA)—The National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) is mounting a campaign to protect the estimated three million children heading back to school this year who are at risk of chickenpox. These children, ages 6-12, who have neither been vaccinated against the virus nor contracted the disease, are at risk of more serious complications than younger children.

This campaign is in response to a NAPNAP-sponsored survey, released today, showing that a significant number of parents are not only unaware of the potentially serious complications of chickenpox—particularly for older children—but also are uninformed about the benefits of vaccination.

The survey, conducted by Yankelovich Partners, Inc., examined the knowledge of 500 parents of 6-12 year olds about chickenpox. Top-line findings showed:

Half of parents said they prefer pox to shot

- 50 percent of parents whose kids are at risk for chickenpox say they'd rather their child have the disease than the vaccine—a statistic in stark contrast with last year's NAPNAP survey, where 73 percent of children themselves said that they would rather have the vaccine than chickenpox.

- One in four parents are reluctant to vaccinate because they do not feel that vaccinating children against chickenpox is important.

- 42 percent of parents did not know that a chickenpox vaccine is available.

Parents are not aware of dangers of all the serious complications of chickenpox

- Nearly 90% of parents were



Experts recommend all children be vaccinated against chickenpox.

unaware that chickenpox could have serious complications, including death.

- 33 percent of parents incorrectly stated that if you do not contract chickenpox as a child, you probably would never get it as an adult.

- 36 percent of parents consider chickenpox a harmless disease and 36 percent believe that chickenpox is only as harmful as acne.

Parents do vaccinate when they know the risks

- After parents were informed of the serious complications associated with chickenpox, 85 percent said they would vaccinate.

Currently, only 22 states require the chickenpox vaccine for daycare and school entry; in the remaining 28 states, many parents skip this important step. According to the survey, 33 percent of parents said they did not vaccinate simply because their child's school did not require it.

"Children in the 6-12 year age range are in a dangerous 'vaccination limbo,'" said NAPNAP representative Linda Juszczak, DNSc, MPH, CPNP, North Shore Univer-

sity Hospital, Long Island, New York. "They were born before the vaccine became available in 1995 and may not have been vaccinated. Because many younger children now routinely receive chickenpox vaccinations, these older children have a lower chance of being exposed to the virus now, increasing their risk of exposure as they age."

"Older individuals, including teens, young adults, adults, and older adults are 10 to 20 times more likely than children to experience complications related to chickenpox," she explained. "Nearly 20 percent of adults with chickenpox develop pneumonia. This disease is not a benign rite of passage."

Six years after its licensure by the Food and Drug Administration, the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine is recommended by all major vaccine policy-making organizations in the U.S. including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. Yet the latest national vaccination rate reported for chickenpox was only about 63 percent, far below that of other childhood vaccine-preventable diseases.

NAPNAP, founded in 1973, is a non-profit specialty nursing organization devoted to improving the quality of infant and childcare. NAPNAP promotes high standards of child health care through education, research and legislative action involving over 6,200 members in 47 chapters across the country.

For more information, please contact Joe Casey, Director of Membership & Communications, at 856-667-1773, or visit the NAPNAP web site at <http://www.napnap.org>.